

18  
DISCOURSES

CONCERNING THE

*Being and natural Perfections*

O F

G O D,

IN WHICH

That First Principle of RELIGION,  
THE

EXISTENCE of the DEITY,

IS PROVED,

From the Frame of the MATERIAL WORLD,  
from the ANIMAL and RATIONAL LIFE,  
and from HUMAN INTELLIGENCE and  
MORALITY.

AND

The DIVINE ATTRIBUTES of SPIRITUALITY,  
UNITY, ETERNITY, IMMENSITY, OMNIPOTENCE,  
OMNISCIENCE, and INFINITE WISDOM, are explain'd.

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By JOHN ABERNETHY, M. A.

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VOLUME I.

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THE THIRD EDITION.

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M.DCC.LVII.


18



DISCOURSES

3.13.1

EXISTENCE OF DEFECTS



**MVSEVM  
BRITANNICVM**

**MUSEUM  
BRITANNICUM**

THE THIRD EDITION.

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S E R-



## S E R M O N I.

The Being of GOD prov'd from the  
Frame of the Material World.

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Rom. i. 19, 20.

*Because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.*

**T**HE mind of man, by attending to its S E R M. I.  
own constitution, and to the state  
and appearances of the world, is nat-  
urally led to an inquiry concerning the ori-  
gin and causes of things, the proper measures  
of its own conduct, with the consequences of  
them, and to future events as far as it can at-  
tain the knowledge of them: that is, to an  
inquiry concerning God and religion. When  
a man, endued with all the vital, sensitive,  
and intellectual powers which belong to his  
nature, and arrived at the perfect exercise of  
V O L. I. A them,

SERM. them, with a competent knowledge of him-

I. self, and the various relations and uses of things about him; when, I say, he deliberately views the obvious face of nature; when he beholds the vast expanse of heaven, the glorious light of the sun, and by it a numberless multitude of other objects, many of which, he knows, by his senses, his appetites, his affections and experience, are in different ways useful to him and to each other; reflecting at the same time on his own being, his various powers and perceptions, one would think he could scarcely avoid such enquiries as these,—

“ Whence am I, and by what power produced? Whence all these beings with which I see myself surrounded? As I have no other knowledge of my existence, nor any other way to judge of its duration, than by conscious perception, I must conclude, that some time ago I was not, for I had no consciousness nor perception of any thing. How then is this wonderful transition from non-existence into being to be accounted for? Is it to be attributed to a superior designing cause? and has that same mighty intelligent cause form’d all those other beings I perceive, which by their appearances seem to be related to each other and to me, so as to make up one  
“ intire

*from the Frame of the Material World.*

3

“intire system? But now that I find myself SERM.  
“in such a situation, what am I to do? I.  
“There are instincts in my nature, which  
“prompt me to various actions and enjoy-  
“ments; I am furnished with the instru-  
“ments of sensation and motion; I see, and  
“hear, and taste, and smell, and feel; I can  
“move the organs of my own body, and  
“by them some other bodies, merely by an  
“act of my own will, or the voluntary exer-  
“tion of an inward self-determining power;  
“I have hunger and thirst at certain return-  
“ing seasons, and am readily supplied with  
“meat and drink, whereby this body is nou-  
“rish’d and sensibly refresh’d. This is com-  
“mon with me to a multitude of living  
“things in different shapes, with which the  
“earth is stor’d: but I find in myself the  
“powers of reason and higher affections,  
“whereof *they* give no discovery, which  
“leads me to conclude there is a nobler end  
“of my being, and I am capable of a greater  
“happiness. I can reflect, compare my own  
“perceptions of things, and inquire into  
“their origin and tendencies; I perceive at  
“first view some truths, and they give me  
“pleasure; I investigate others by a delibe-  
“rate attention to my own ideas, and to  
“their agreement and relations, still with a  
A 2 “growing

*The Being of God prov'd*

SERM.

I.

“ growing satisfaction ; I am conscious of liberty or a freedom of choice, and the ideas of right and wrong in action, naturally occur to me ; I must therefore be directed in my conduct by a regard to that difference ; I find benevolence to sensitive beings, especially those of my own kind, naturally arise in my mind, together with reverence and gratitude to a superior nature, the supposed author of my existence and of all my enjoyments ; which affections, as they are reflected on with delightful self-approbation, a more excellent enjoyment than any sensible object can yield ; so they are accompanied with a desire to please that superior Being, and be approved by him. But how shall I continue possess'd of existence, with all the variety of enjoyment that belongs to it, which is so very desirable ? And since experience convinces me that the present life is frail, and has in it a mixture of unhappiness, what prospect have I of a future state, (for the thoughts of falling again into nothing fill my mind with horror ; ) and how shall I attain to the highest perfection I am capable of ? For it plainly appears that, at least, the nobler powers of my nature may admit of a more various exercise than the present, and a further



“ther improvement. All that is possible for SERM.  
“me to do, as an intelligent agent, whereby I.  
“I may contribute to my own happiness,  
“and answer the end of my being, is to fol-  
“low the guidance of my own reason and  
“what nature points to, considering the  
“whole of my constitution, and preserving  
“the just subordination of its lower, to its  
“superior parts: and for the continuance of  
“my being, and what additional felicity I  
“may desire or expect, I must hope in the  
“same supreme power and goodness, to which  
“I owe all that is now in my possession.”

If these are the inquiries and the sentiments which the mind of man, unbiass'd by any prejudices or prepossessions, would naturally fall into; (and whether they are or not, let any one judge, who carefully attends even to the most obvious appearances in the human constitution,) we may consider whether they are not very becoming us. It is true we grow up to the exercise of our reason gradually; the first part of life is pass'd over with very little reflection; the world is become familiar to us; we have learn'd the use of things, and opinions concerning them, which engage our assent and our affections, before we come to that maturity of understanding which is necessary to qualify us for a thorough and ra-



SERM. tional examination. But neither the familia-

I. rity contracted with our own existence and the world, (we cannot but be sensible, that our knowledge of both is of no long standing,) nor any prejudice we may have received in a childish immature state, should divert us, when we have attained to the full use of our reason, from attending such important inquiries, which the least self-reflection will shew to be every way worthy of men. Whether our inquiries will rationally end in religion, founded on the belief of a Deity, is what I am now to consider. This, however, seems to be the plainest and most natural way of attaining satisfaction in that great point; For by the Deity we mean the powerful, wise and good parent of mankind, the maker, preserver, and ruler, of the world; and how shall we know him but by the characters of his perfections stamp'd upon his works? Thus the apostle argues in my text, *That which may be known of God is manifest to men, for God hath shew'd it unto them* (by their own reason.) *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.*

It is certain, the belief of a Deity has generally obtained among mankind. Excepting the

the objects of the mind's immediate intuition and of sense, concerning which there can be no dispute; excepting these, I say, perhaps there is not any one point to which Men have more universally given an explicit assent, than the Being of God. This is thought, by some, to be a strong presumption in its favour; for they alledge, nothing but the clear irrefragable evidence of truth could have induced all nations of the world to agree in it. As to vulgar opinions, acknowledged to be erroneous in other points, such as the magnitude and distance of the heavenly bodies, the case is very different; for there the error plainly arises from inattention, and forming a judgment too hastily upon the report of sense, concerning appearances which it cannot examine. But in such a point of speculation as the existence of the Deity, to the knowledge of which we are led by our own most obvious reflections, and which the more it is attended to, the more firmly it is believed; an uniform agreement seems to proceed from the voice of nature, or God himself speaking intelligibly to every nation by his works. There is, undoubtedly, in the human mind, a knowledge of things which are not the objects of sense, nay in many instances reason corrects sense, and discovers its mistakes: in-

SERM. deed, the greatest certainty we have is in the  
 I. clear perception of an agreement between our  
 own abstract ideas; so that a concurring persuasion concerning propositions form'd of such ideas, and concerning rational deductions from them, has the best appearance of being founded on truth, because in them men are least obnoxious to deception.

There have been however some, very few of mankind in comparison, who have professedly denied the being of God, and pretended to account for the formation of the world, and all the phænomena of nature, without Him. These men ridicule the common belief as superstitious, proceeding wholly from ignorance of causes, political fiction, customary tradition, or the passion of fear, which often produces groundless imaginations, I may afterwards have occasion to examine these pretences. In the mean time without resting this first principle of all religion on the presumption in its favour, taken from the general consent of mankind, or any other presumptions, however strong, I shall proceed directly to establish it by clear evidence of reason, in the method which appears to me the most simple and natural. Only let it be observed,

That

That the notions of men, concerning the Deity and his Attributes, have been very confused, and their opinions widely different, even *theirs* who agree in the professed belief of his Being: Some have declared themselves unable to form any idea of substance distinct from body; and therefore concluded, that as the human soul is only a subtile kind of matter, or a particular modification of it, so God himself is corporeal. This way of thinking, tho' very gross, is plainly discover'd in the writings of the celebrated *stoic* philosophers, mixt at the same time with noble sentiments, concerning the Divine moral perfections and providence. Some conceived that the creation of material substance was absolutely impossible, tho' it is entirely subject to the disposal of active intelligence; and that therefore it must be coeval with the supreme Being, whom they imagined to be the eternal soul of an eternal universe. Others seem to have deny'd the unity of the Godhead, at least, they divided their worship among a plurality of divine beings, so called; tho' 'tis probable, the Polytheism of the Gentiles is to be understood, concerning a multiplicity of inferior agents in the Divine administration, or ministring spirits, all subject to the one Supreme. Others again, have so perplex'd the doctrine of the Divine

eter-

SERM.  
I.



SERM. eternity and immensity, as to render them un-

1. intelligible. But above all, the errors concerning the moral perfections, as they are most pernicious, have been the most frequent in the world, the *Christian* world itself not altogether excepted. Not to mention the Gods of *Epicurus*, which he imagined, or pretended to have imagined, to be a kind of indolent happy things, neither the makers nor rulers of any thing, but like other beings, made out of atoms by accident: I say, pretended to have imagined; for it is not unlikely that part of his scheme was a complement to the religion of mankind, or rather a sneer, such as is not unusual with writers of his sort. The heathens had, many of them, very absurd conceptions of the morals of their inferior gods; and *Jupiter* himself was far from being perfectly pure and good. There are, even among those who have the best means of instruction, very gross opinions, and of a dangerous tendency, concerning the justice and goodness of God, and the measures of his government over moral agents; which it is needless now to insist on more particularly.

The use I shall make at present of this observation, is, to avoid at our entrance on this subject, a particular definition of the Deity, by enumerating all the perfections, which I  
hope



hope we shall, in the sequel, see reason to at-tribute to him, because the present controversy is only with *Atheists*, not with any, even of the most imperfect *Theists*. Besides, I think, in such an inquiry, we ought to begin with the plainest principles, that having once seen them established with clear evidence, we may then proceed to points less obvious. Thus, if it first appears by convincing proof, that there is an intelligent designing cause in the universe, to which the order and appearances of it are to be ascribed, we may thence take our rise to the consideration of the characters of that cause, and so by degrees advance to the most compleat notion of God which we can form.

I shall therefore consider the subject before us in the simplest view, and begin with an inquiry into the true cause of the visible frame of nature, stating the question, as it thus plainly stands between us and our adversaries, Whether the material world, with its principal and most obvious phænomena which fall under our observation, is formed and guided by mere chance, or blind necessity, (which are the different hypotheses of *Atheism*) and I shall examine them severally: Or, if on the contrary, it was produced by, and is under the direction of an active, understanding, and intending Cause?

In

SERM.  
I.

SERM. In order to this, let us first consider the

I. ideas of intelligence and activity, of cause and effect, and of necessity and chance, which arise in our minds, by attending to what passes in them, and by observing what our senses inform us of, in the ordinary course of things. Perception is always and necessarily accompanied with consciousness. That a man sees and hears, and remembers and understands, and reasons, and desires, and wills, needs no proof to him, nor indeed is capable of any; nothing being so evident to his mind, not the very existence of any thing without him; nor is it possible, without consciousness, to convince a man of any operation or perception in his own mind. Our agency, from an inward self-determining principle, is as well known to us, as our passive perceptions are: As we cannot help seeing, hearing, perceiving pleasure upon some occasions, and pain upon others, whether external or internal; we are as sensible that we can, without a consciousness of any necessity impelling, turn our attention to one object in preference to another; we can recal the ideas which have been formerly in our minds; we can variously associate them, compare and examine their relations to each other; conscious that these operations do not  
arise

arise from without, but depend wholly upon SERM.  
our selves; and we are equally sensible, that I.  
some corporeal motions proceed from the de-  
termination of our own wills. Our bodies  
begin to move, or particular members of  
them; some other bodies also are moved by  
their force; and all such motions are conti-  
nued or stopt, while we are not conscious  
of any thing whereby either the continuance  
or cessation are produc'd, but our own sim-  
ple volitions.

Hence arise the notions of free or volun-  
tary Agency, and necessity as distinguish'd  
from it, and of cause and effect. Such pow-  
ers as we find in our selves, we can easily  
conceive to belong to other Beings, either in  
a greater or lesser degree. As we have clear  
evidence of perception and spontaneous mo-  
tions in other Animals, tho' different in kind  
from, and both of them much more con-  
fin'd, than ours; so there is no difficulty in  
apprehending that there may be intelligence  
of a much larger comprehension than the  
human, and a more extensive activity, pro-  
ducing more numerous, and vastly greater  
effects.

We have at the same time the idea of  
what is called passive Power, or, a capacity  
of being moved and changed: For we can  
move

SERM. move our own Bodies, and alter the situation,

I. the external form, and the sensible qualities, of other bodies, by the use of proper means, which we have learn'd by observation and experience. And these bodies we find to be constantly and uniformly liable to the same, or the like alterations, by active force. Whatever appearance there is of action in this sort of beings, will be found upon closer attention, to be really no action at all. A man can easily distinguish between walking, and being carried; between the involuntary motion of his hand, and that which depends solely upon the command of his own will: in the one, he is an agent, in the other wholly passive. In like manner, a stone falling, (which we do not conceive to move from an internal principle, because no power of self-motion ever appears in that kind of being,) is no more active than the earth on which it makes an impression, or the human body which it bruises, occasioning a sensation of pain: and for other corporeal action, so called, producing various and considerable effects, such as that of fire and air, it can only be attributed to the intestine motion, not spontaneous, of more subtile material parts; and therefore is no more properly action than the motion of intire solid bodies, whose parts  
are

are at rest among themselves, that is, do not SERM.  
at all change their situation with respect to I.  
each other.

Thus we are led to distinguish between the positive ideas of blind necessity and intelligent activity, as directly opposite to each other, the one belonging to a cause, the other to an effect. Indeed the negative idea of necessary existence is not self-contradictory, no more than that of infinity. But to say that unintelligent necessity operates, must, I think, appear to our minds to be a contradiction in terms: it is to assert operation, and at the same time deny it in a proper sense, and to destroy the very notion of activity, which yet we know as clearly as we do our own existence, being equally conscious of it. There may be, 'tis true, a train of necessary effects, as in the instance of motion communicated to various inanimate bodies, one impelling another successively; and the prior has the appearance of causing the posterior: But really they are alike passive; and to imagine that they operate, is to confound the most inconsistent notions of acting and being acted upon. And as thus the ideas of cause and effect, of active and passive power, of agency and necessity, take their rise from an attention to our selves, our own minds and our bodies;  
so



SERM. so we cannot avoid observing the same dif-

I. ference among all other beings which we know. I have not indeed the same intuitive knowledge of another man's conscious activity, as I have of my own, but yet I have such evidence of it, as excludes all doubt: nor can I question, but that the earth I walk on, the pen I hold in my hand, and other instruments of action which I use, are passive inanimate things, always yielding to force, and never discovering the least sign of an inward self-determining principle. This distinction runs through the whole universe, as far as we are acquainted with it; and all the knowledge we have of being, our own or any other, leads us to discern the essential irreconcilable contrariety of spontaneous acting, to blind necessity. It follows, that if there be any things or appearances, which we judge to be effects in the world, (and who can help observing a multitude of them?) to attribute them to unintelligent necessity, is to attribute them to what we can have no notion of as a cause at all; and to say that such necessity is universal, is to say there is not, nor can be any such thing as a cause, or it is to deny the possibility of action.

It is still to be remembered, that the necessity here spoken of, is only such as excludes

cludes intelligence and design: The question S E R M.  
concerning necessary agency in another sense, I.  
that is, whether an intelligent agent acts so  
necessarily, that it is impossible in the event  
he should act otherwise than he does, what-  
ever the reason be;—This question, I say, is  
intirely different, and not concern'd in the  
controverfy with *Atheists*. For supposing it to  
be determin'd in the affirmative, still it leaves  
us the idea of intelligent active power, as a  
proper cause producing effects; and, with re-  
spect to the formation and order of the uni-  
verse, the idea of an intelligent active power  
equal to the production of such an effect;  
which is what we mean by the Deity. But  
to attribute operation to undesigning necessity,  
is to attribute it to an abstract notion, and to  
confound all our ideas of cause and effect.  
And how can a man, who is as fully convinc'd  
of active power in himself, as of his own ex-  
istence, and in the same manner, that is, by  
being conscious of it, reason with him who  
denies the being, and even the possibility of  
such a power? And how absurd an assertion  
must it appear, that nothing at all, not the  
least being in nature, nor any mode or qua-  
lity, not so much as the least motion, could  
possibly (by an antecedent necessity, inde-  
pendant on design,) have been otherwise than

SERM. it is? Can a man believe this, who sees such

I. marks of indifferency in a multitude of things,  
 so many changes in the face of nature, and  
 knows that so many depend on his own choice?

The notion of chance, so far as it relates to the present subject, arises wholly from mens ignorance of causes. As we see very often in the world many changeable appearances, which by the novelty, variety, and other circumstances of them, we can't help believing to be effects, but not being particularly determined by any necessity, nor yet by the intention of any agent which we can observe, the word chance is substituted in the place of the unknown cause. And this may be sufficient for some purposes, for which the knowledge of causes is of no importance. But in an inquiry concerning the origin of things, to apply chance as a kind of hypothesis to solve the appearances of nature, and account for the order of the world, is evidently absurd. For the word so apply'd, can have no other signification than ignorance, or nothing at all; tho' in some mens minds, at least in their manner of expressing themselves, there seem to be utterly inconsistent ideas confusedly jumbled together, as the signification of it. For they seem to imagine a kind of efficiency at the same time that there is no certain

tain determinate cause, (which it is impossible S E R M.  
for them to know;) that is, they most absurd- I.  
ly attribute a real uncertain efficiency, to no-  
thing, to an empty sound, or a vague unde-  
termined notion; when, if they would ex-  
amine their thoughts, they would find that  
the true meaning of chance is only, we don't  
know what.

Thus we see the *Atheistic* schemes concern-  
ing the formation of the world, its order and  
appearances, instead of giving a rational, in-  
telligible account, are founded only in igno-  
rance, and indeed are everfive of true human  
knowledge. The one of them (*Necessity*) de-  
stroys the very idea of intelligent and design-  
ing activity, which is as clear to our minds  
as any idea can be, being perceiv'd by an in-  
ward consciousness; the other (*Chance*) is an  
utter absurdity, made up of inconsistent no-  
tions, and really meaning nothing but igno-  
rance.

But I will not content myself with argu-  
ing thus against the hypothesis of the *Atheists*  
in general. Let us allow more than they  
have any pretence in reason to demand: Let  
us suppose necessity to stand for something,  
whose operation is like that of material causes,  
(improperly so called,) which effect ap-  
pearances by an undirected impulse, or with-

SERM. out the interposition of any design. A constant

I. uniformity however, must be included in the  
 idea of such operation: for necessity, whether  
 it be applied to existence, power, or whatever  
 else, admits of no change, no interruption,  
 no variety either in kind or degree. And let  
 chance, however inconsistently, be suppos'd  
 to be something, we don't know what, which  
 operates, but its operation is not determin'd,  
 either by a natural necessity, or by counsel.  
 Now, if neither of these hypotheses, (between  
 which *Atheists* have been divided, some choo-  
 sing the one, some the other, and a different  
*Atheistical* hypothesis never has been, nor can  
 be devised; but) if, I say, neither of them can  
 reasonably be admitted in accounting for the  
 being and disposition of things, as in fact they  
 appear, there is then nothing left to rest in,  
 but the contrivance and agency of an intelli-  
 gent cause. But that neither of these hypo-  
 theses does answer the profess'd design, *viz.* to  
 explain the formation and order of the world,  
 I shall endeavour to shew clearly, from the  
 common appearances, which cannot possibly  
 have escap'd the most careless observer. What-  
 ever way we turn our eyes, to whatever part  
 of the universe, or the whole of it which is  
 visible to us, the face of nature has these two  
 characters, which no one can help observing;  
 it



it is various, and it is uniform ; the former is SERM.  
a convincing argument against necessity, and I.  
the latter against chance. }

First, there appears in the visible frame of nature, a great variety. When we look up to the heavens in the day, our sight, piercing through a thin pellucid medium, terminates in a vast azure concave, without any diversity ; only that we see in it a great luminous fiery globe, which we conclude to be the fountain of light ; and sometimes interposed clouds, which by observation and reason ; we know to be only watery exhalations from the earth gathered together in a region not far distant from us, and when they are condensed, falling down again in rain ; but when we turn our eyes the same way at night, the prospect is quite changed, and a new scene presented to us. The great ruling luminary of the day is withdrawn, and in his stead there are seen numberless lesser lights ; among them one larger than the rest, with various appearance, conspicuous but pale, and shining with a faint and borrowed lustre. This is the constantly changing appearance of the heavens in every diurnal revolution ; besides other periodical alterations in the course of the sun and the moon, which every one must observe. In our own globe, which our eyes can more accurately

B 3

survey,



SERM. survey, there appears a much greater diversity;—a vast collection of waters, supplied by perpetual currents, dispersed in several channels, continually flowing into it;—on the solid part where we live, here mountains and rocks, there plains and valleys; in one place stately groves, in another flowry meadows, or fields covered with corn, all stock'd with numerous inhabitants; the sea stor'd with fishes of surprizingly various shapes and sizes, the dry land with as great a diversity of beasts, and the air with fowls. I do not speak now of the mutual relations of these things, the suitability of one to another, and the convenient regular disposition of all, which must strike an attentive mind with a sense of natural beauty in the whole, and lead it to the acknowledgment of wisdom and goodness in the author; but upon the most indifferent superficial view, which presents to us such an amazing variety, and without looking narrowly into the composition of particular beings, which greatly increases it, let any man think, if he can, that blind, undefining necessity has produc'd such a multiform appearance. The operation of necessary causes, if they must be call'd causes, is always alike, and admits of no changes. The mechanical powers of springs, weights and wheels, and other instruments of motion,  
are

are exerted uniformly. Fire is another necessary corporeal agent, which operates always in the same manner, tho' it has different effects, according to the different texture of the bodies into which it penetrates, causing some parts to ascend in smoke and flame, reducing some to ashes, and making some liquid or malleable. To give these and such like instruments, that diversity of operation, which is necessary to answer even the low Purposes of human art, and the conveniencies of human life, there must be, we know, a superior intending Cause, to guide the application of them: But that such necessary causes, as senseless atoms, should, out of themselves, without any skill in the application of their force, or the interposal of any intelligent direction, produce such a wonderful variety as there is in the visible appearance of the world.—the liquid waters, and the more fluid air of a different constitution; the strangely subtle and penetrating light; the solid earth, and the firmer rocks; the almost infinite kinds of vegetables, diverse in shape, colour, flower and fruit; not only the many species of animals and the numberless individuals, each intire, but the yet more various parts of their composition, the solid and the fluid, the organs of motion and sensation;—this is such a paradox, it must be an understanding of a very odd make, that can believe it.

S E R M.  
I.

SERM. The *Atheist* may next betake himself to

I. chance, which is capricious enough, and variable, to answer the greatest imaginable or possible diversity of productions, if it be admitted to have any share in them. Necessity is limited, and must always produce exactly similar and unvarying effects; but fickle chance is tied down to no rule of operation, if it can operate at all. Supposing it to determine the existence, and the order of things, what should hinder the diversity which there is in the world, nay, an infinitely greater diversity? Why may not water, and air, and light, and rocks, and animals, and vegetables, all kinds of substances, and all possible qualities, be jumbled together? But as the variety which there is in the appearances of nature, is an invincible argument against their being the production of necessary causes, an equally strong objection lies against the hypothesis of chance, namely, their uniformity. Every one must be sensible, that *this* is as truly the character of the face of nature, as the *other*. Whenever we turn our eyes to the heavens, they have the same uniform aspect as when we view'd them before, the sun and the moon, and the stars, hold their places, and go on constantly in their courses, producing a regular succession of day and night, summer and winter: One would think *they*

*continue*

*continue after an ordinance, and are subject to* SERM.  
a law, rather than guided by giddy hazard. I.

In our lower world, not only *the hills are everlasting*, and the *rocks not removed out of their place*; but the waters, however easily yielding to force, keep their perpetual channels; and the whole self-balanc'd globe hangs in loose fluid air, which has no strength to support it. The tender herbs, which seem to die every winter, revive again in the spring, and cover the earth with a renewed verdure. The living things of so brittle a frame and short liv'd, yet do not quite disappear and give way to different kinds, which being equally possible, have an equal chance for production, if chance ruled, but the same species are perpetuated in a constant succession. If this argument were pursued more minutely, it would still appear the stronger. If we do not take the works of nature in the gross, and content ourselves with a bare view of their outsides, but examine their interior constitution, the evidence against hazard in their formation will still increase; for it must be plain to every one, that the more complicated any pieces of work, machines or systems are, design is still the more apparent in their similarity. But the most obvious view is sufficient to our purpose. For let any man consider whether he would not make a  
difference

SERM. difference between heaps of sand and stones huddled together in confusion, and a regular building ; between a fortuitous jumble of pieces of brass, iron and lead, and a well going clock ; between a mob, or a tumultuous assembly of men without any order, and a well form'd political society, or a well disciplin'd army ; let him consider, I say, whether he would not make a difference in these cases, presuming there was counsel and design in some, but not in others. And now, if we apply the same reasoning to the works of nature, whereas, upon the supposition of chance, there is infinite to one against any certain determin'd production, (for chance ranges unguided, to the utmost verge of possibility, when in fact, we see amidst an almost infinite variety of things, there is such an obvious constant uniformity in the appearances of the world,) is it not surprizing, that it should ever have entered into the mind of any man, to exclude design, and attribute all to chance ?

The argument so far as we have proceeded, seems to be fully conclusive, and we may confidently rest in it as prov'd, that neither the hypothesis of chance, nor of undesigning necessity, can account for the appearances of the universe. But we shall be more directly convinced that there is manifested intelligence and design



design in the frame of the mundane system, if SERM.  
in the next place we consider what the an- I.

cients called τὸ ἐν καὶ καλῶς, the beautiful and harmonious, the regular and convenient, the amiable and good, with which the world every where abounds. This point admits of a large illustration, all the discoveries which have been made in astronomy, natural philosophy, and natural history, tending to shew that there is a fitness in things, a correspondence in the parts of the world, one answering to another so as to demonstrate wise contrivance, and unity of design in the whole. There is not one region of the universe of which we have any knowledge, the heavens, the air, the earth, or the sea, not one intire particular being which we have the means of inquiring narrowly into, one fish, one fowl, one beast or one tree; there is not one of all these that does not appear to be artificially made, and does not by the exact proportion and harmony of its parts, discover design in the whole of its constitution. And indeed, in these last ages particularly, men of leisure and penetration have so happily employed their time and their understandings in the study of nature, as to set the agument in a very clear light, proving beyond all rational contradiction, the wisdom and goodness of God in his works,

to


SERM. to the utter confusion of those who are either  
 I. so stupidly blind or obstinately wicked as not  
 to regard the operation of his hands.

But I shall only insist on those things which every understanding must discern, the appearances which every eye sees, or the observations of fact which must occur to the most unattentive of mankind, who has but common sense; for even *they* will be sufficient to establish this great truth upon. Let us first consider the visible world at large, as it appears to a naked eye, and to a plain, unimproved understanding. No man of the meanest capacity, and the lowest way of thinking, can be ignorant that there is a relation between the parts of the universe; that from the sun there is a communication of light and heat to the earth, which is the apparent cause of the various productions upon its surface, and of so manifold use to its inhabitants, that they could not subsist without it. By that genial warmth tender plants of different kinds spring up from small seeds, and are nourished, some into strong stalks, some into low shrubs, and some into stately trees, all bearing fruits which are the food of animals: and among animals there is an order and mutual usefulness, the other kinds being in subordination to man, who by the prerogative

prerogative of his superior nature, claims a SERM.  
dominion over their labours and their lives. I.

To man particularly, and to other living things proportionably to the lower purposes of their being, the light of the sun is so comfortable and so useful, that we cannot conceive how the ends of a life, constituted as ours is, could be answered, and its conveniences obtained, without it. But that light, and the nourishing heat with which it is accompanied, is so conveniently distributed, as in the best manner to illuminate and animate the whole earth, the globular figure of which requires a diurnal rotation, that all the dwellers on it may be supplied in their turns; nor do any of them especially not the principal, suffer by the darkness they are overspread with, whilst the sun visits others with his benign influences; for night gives man a necessary vacation from the labours of the day. But no one can avoid observing the changes of the seasons, occasion'd by the annual (apparent) course of the sun. If he kept one perpetual track, the greatest part of the earth must be uninhabited, either by reason of excessive heat or cold; the gloomy regions never visited by him, must be shut up in continual darkness and impenetrable frost, while the climates on which his beams should still  
directly

SERM. directly fall, must be quite burnt up, yielding

I.  ing no sustenance for man or beast. But instead of these extremes, how commodiously is this great benefit dispensed, by the fixed periodical revolution of the great orb in a yearly course, so directed as to prevent, so far as can be, the excesses both of heat and cold, and produce the grateful and useful variety of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. Again, if we take but even a slight view of this lower world itself, we shall see an admirable correspondence between its parts; however different they are, yet every one fitted to another, and to all the rest, so as to make the whole a convenient dwelling-place for the several tribes of animals which live upon it, and for mankind especially. The solid earth supports our heavy bodies; the thin air we breathe, is absolutely necessary to our preservation; and no one can be ignorant of how manifold use water is, not only more remotely, by serving the purposes of vegetation, but by the immediate refreshment it gives, and as a means of the decent and comfortable enjoyment of life. Every element has its proper inhabitants, which by the peculiar make and organization of their bodies, are adapted to it: The fishes have fins, the land animals feet and legs, and even the groveling reptile is furnished with the

the proper instruments of its slow motion : **SERM.**

All these so various, that the kinds of them  
can scarcely be numbered, have food convenient for them, and every thing which is suitable to their several natures.

**I.**

Now, even upon this general imperfect view, let any man judge whether there be not clear evidence of contrivance and design in the formation of our world ; indeed, whether it does not appear such a regular connected system, as considering the infinite variety of its parts, all of them so exquisitely fitted to each other, and disposed in such exact order, as to make a perfect harmony in the whole ; whether, I say, considering this, any understanding less than infinite, could have form'd the model ? This is so plain, I do not think it needful to use many words in illustrating it. The truth is, I cannot help concluding, that without the most unaccountable infatuation, or perverseness, every one must acknowledge it. Surely it would be far less absurd to imagine, that the most curious machine ever fram'd by human art, the most beautiful edifice, the finest picture, or the most delightful musical harmony ;—that these, any, or all of them, made themselves, by a merely casual mixture of their parts, than that this stupendous and most artificial fabric of the universe, arose  
from



SERM. from nothing, or from rude, utterly indispo-  
 I. posed materials, by undirected necessity or  
 hazard.

Before we proceed any further, let us stop here to make one obvious reflection, or rather indulge ourselves in those thoughts which will naturally arise. The human mind is so constituted, as to have a pleasing sense of beauty, in order, proportion and harmony, particularly, as it is thereby led to apprehend wisdom and good design in the contrivance. It is this which affords so various and delightful entertainment, from the curious productions of the artist's hand, but first of his mind. One admires statuary, another architecture, another gardening, others are delighted with the compositions which are merely the work of genius, without any gross materials, such as poetry and history: But still it is the regularity that pleases, the proportion of the parts, and the harmony of the whole; and the more complicated and various the matter or the subject is, it is the more pleasing, provided the regularity be apparent. Why then should we not admire the beauties of nature? Nay, don't we all agree, that those are the most beautiful works of art, which copy the most exactly after nature, and are the truest imitation of her original forms?

Let

Let us therefore fix our thoughts in a steady **SERM.**  
contemplation of the world about us; view it **I.**  
in this light, as a regular finish'd system, discovering exquisite skill in the exact proportion of all its parts, and a perfect symmetry in the whole. In vain shall we seek for beauty, harmony and order, in the productions of human genius: If we turn our eyes with attention to all things around us, in their simple natural appearance, the idea of a nobler regularity, and more grand design, will arise in our minds. Is there any image made by painting or sculpture, equal to the human face and person, any map or landskip to the natural soil itself diversified with real rocks and hills, tall trees in blossom or laden with fruit, and cattle ranging the wide pasture? How wonderful is the structure of a single animal, inimitable by art; its parts made according to exact measure, and so conveniently situated, that every one performs its proper functions, useful to the whole? this animal has a near relation to the kind, the kind itself to other species; all in such a due disposition, that every individual is provided for, living commodiously on this terrestrial globe, which continually receives its vital warmth whereby they are nourished, from the far distant heavenly bodies, holding on their perpetual course. Here is a noble

SERM. subject of meditation, to a mind that delights

I. in harmony and order; but whither will it  
 lead us? Directly to the acknowledgment of  
 perfect understanding in the universe, of all-  
 ruling wisdom, in conjunction with the most  
 amiable goodness, the true compleat original  
 beauty, the fountain of all excellence and per-  
 fection. *Praise the Lord all ye his works;  
 praise him ye angels and all his hosts; praise  
 him sun and moon; praise him ye stars of light;  
 praise him ye heavens of heavens, and ye wa-  
 ters that are above the heavens. Let them  
 praise the name of the Lord, for he command-  
 ed and they were created, he hath also esta-  
 blished them for ever, he hath made a decree  
 which shall not pass. Praise the Lord from  
 the earth, ye dragons and all deeps, fire and  
 hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind fulfilling  
 his word, mountains and all hills, fruitful  
 trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle,  
 creeping things and flying fowl. Kings of the  
 earth and all people, princes and judges. Both  
 young men and maidens, old men and children.  
 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his  
 name alone is excellent, his glory is above the  
 earth and heaven\*. O Lord, how manifold are  
 thy works? In wisdom thou hast made them all,  
 the earth is full of thy riches; so is the great  
 and*

\* Psal. cxlviii.

*and wide sea, wherein are things creeping in- SERM.  
numerable, both great and small beasts. These I.  
wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them  
their meat in due season. That thou givest them  
they gather; thou openest thy hand, they are  
filled with good \*. Therefore let every one  
of us resolve with the devout Psalmist †, I  
will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I  
will sing praises to my God while I have being.*

\* Psal. civ. v. 24., 25, 27, 28.

† v. 33.

## S E R M O N II.

The Being of God prov'd from the  
Animal and Rational Life.

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Rom. i. 19, 20.

*Because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.*

SERM.  
II.

THE main point in debate between us and *Atheists*, is concerning the intelligence of the supreme Being. They will not deny, that something must have existed from eternity, either the world in its present form, or the materials of it put into form by chance or necessity. They will acknowledge too that the eternal self-existent Being must be called, in some sense, the cause of all things; and perhaps they may add, that it has a kind of passive perception and consciousness. The ancient *Hylozoists*, ascrib'd life and understanding



standing to matter, whereby it form'd itself into SERM.  
regular systems ; and some of the modern *A-* II.  
*theists* pretend to acknowledge a sort of neces-  
sary perception in the Deity, meaning by the  
Deity the universal substance, as they call it,  
that is, the entire system of things, compre-  
hending all particular beings as its parts : But  
an active intelligence, as the proper efficient  
cause of the world, and distinct from the  
world, designing and directing its formation,  
all *Atheists* deny and must deny.

This is what I have propos'd to prove,  
shewing, according to the Apostle's assertion  
in the text, from the creation of the world,  
that the invisible things of God are clearly  
seen, being understood by the things which  
are made. And I have, in a former discourse, in-  
sisted on the general order of the visible world,  
the relation and mutual dependance of it, parts,  
such as the heavens and the earth, with the  
vast number and various kinds of beings it con-  
tains, clearly demonstrating it to be one beauti-  
ful connected system, which necessarily requi-  
red an active designing intelligence to its for-  
mation. But besides this general proof, distinct  
arguments to establish the same principle may  
be drawn from particular appearances in nature,  
which cannot possibly be explained by the for-  
tuitous or necessary concurrence of atoms, or  
any rude and prepared materials. And,

SERM. The first I shall mention is the animal life,

II. of which we see a numberless variety ; bodies growing up from very small beginnings, by imperceptible degrees, to a large bulk, and animated by a principle, which is endued with sense and self-motion. The structure of animal bodies is curious, consisting of parts exquisitely fine, and most artificially disposed for receiving nourishment and a gradual increase ; but above all, the faculties of perception and spontaneous motion, are never to be accounted for, without the interposal of an intelligent Cause.

Some mechanic philosophers, even who profess to believe a Deity, have made too near approaches to *Atheism* ; at least, too much serv'd its cause, by pretending to explain all the Phænomena of the world, without any divine interposition. But they appear to be very bungling world-makers, and their hypotheses, not only defective, failing in a tolerably fair solution of many very important and very common appearances ; but some of their essential principles have been demonstrated to be false. Especially in the point before us, their schemes are most remarkably defeated ; for they have never been able to give, I do not say, a certain and satisfying, but even a plausible account of the animal constitution, in any state of its existence, or any step of its progress, from its  
com-

commencement to its perfection, especially, SERM.  
II.  
not of the sentient and self-moving powers.

The formation of the fœtus is, as the scripture justly calls it, a work *curious and wonderful*, according to a divine model; *its members were all writ in the volume of God's book*, that is, the composition of all its parts exactly answers to his designing idea. Not to insist on the modern discoveries, whereby it seems probable that the nutrition of an animal, in the dark recess appointed for its first abode, and where its existence has been generally thought to commence, is no more than extending and enlarging upon the slender pre-existent, vital flamen; (which leads us still more clearly to the acknowledgment of a mighty creating hand, the wise author of nature;) not to insist on this, it is evident to an attentive mind, that no general impulse or motion impress'd upon matter, according to mechanical laws, can give us the least tolerable pretence for imagining, that, in the first stage of its being, an animal cou'd have been produc'd without a special intelligent direction.

The notions of the Epicurean Atheists, concerning the origin of animals, and man in particular, are so ridiculously absurd, that it is scarce decent enough to repeat them. They profess to imagine, that as numberless atoms,

SERM. after moving fortuitously through a successive

II. infinite duration, in an infinite void, at last,  
 by various unguided rencounters, accidentally  
 jumbled themselves into this terraqueous globe,  
 and these beautiful celestial spheres; so the  
 earth having been long barren, yet still retain-  
 ing the motive quality of its parts, (no body  
 knows from whence derived) and therefore  
 labouring with a strong actual intestine motion,  
 in process of time brought forth monstrous  
 unshap'd births, which had some little like-  
 nesses to living things of the several kinds, and  
 it may be some low beginnings of life which  
 could not long subsist for want of proper vehi-  
 cles; at length, after many imperfect essays,  
 growing more skilful in the plastic art, (strange  
 how that should come to pass!) she produc'd  
 finish'd complete animals. If one should ask  
 how it happens in all ages of the world, of  
 which we have any historical monuments,  
 there are not the least footsteps of such ge-  
 neration: No man ever saw, or pretends to  
 have seen animals of any kind, perfect or im-  
 perfect, issue from the teeming womb of mo-  
 ther earth: what can the reason be according  
 to this philosopher? Is it that she became bar-  
 ren by age? This is hard to conceive, con-  
 sidering that she came to her prolific virtue so  
 late as after an eternity was past; and that the

constituent atoms had preserv'd their vigour in SERM.  
an unwearied dance thro' numberless ages. Or II.

did she wisely (but who made her wise?) resign her fertility, when the settled law (by what direction?) took place for the more orderly propagation of the species? Again, if it be enquired in what condition these earth-born animals appeared; did they come to the world in a state of maturity, and of different sexes, ready to increase and multiply? This is the account given in the Mosaic history of the creation, but must be resolv'd as it is most reasonably in that history, into the mighty command of the Creator as the sole cause. But if the animals were thrust out in infancy, (which the Epicureans choose to say, that their formation in every step of its progress may look the more like random work) the question then will be, how were they cared for, how defended in that weak and helpless state? Here the most precarious suppositions are heap'd up very unphilosophically, a several hypothesis to solve every particular difficulty; too plainly shewing, that philosophers of this sort will admit of any thing, be it ever so absurd, rather than a Deity; and having resolved in their hearts that they will not see God, they indulge their imaginations in the most unbounded liberty of forming pretences, whereby they may harden themselves in unbelief. Since

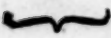


SERM. Since I have mentioned some of these inferior appearances in the animal kingdom, I shall take notice of one more which strongly evinces intelligent direction, that is, the conservation of the distinct species, by a regular propagation. Is it not a surprizing thing, and to them who deny a governing wisdom in the universe, utterly inexplicable, that for so many ages wherein we have any knowledge of animals being in the world, unerring nature has followed one invariable rule in their production? The several kinds remain as distinct as ever they were, they have never run into confusion, nor mix'd with each other. We see no such thing as Syrens and Centaurs, which are only the creatures of human imagination; and yet if we exclude ruling wisdom, they might have a chance for actual existence as well as intire men, or intire horses, intire women, or intire fishes. But there has never once such a monster happened as a human face joined to a brutal body, or so much as the head of a bull placed upon the neck of an afs. Nay, so true is nature to her rule, and so nicely accurate in preserving the distinction, that when two kinds so nearly resemble each other, as the horse and the afs, that there is not difference enough in the outward form to direct the instinct of the sexes, and therefore they mingle

minge together; there is no farther propaga- S E R M.  
tion of that sort, the anomalous breed termi- II.  
nates in the first production, and no new spe-  
cies arises.

Again, as none of the species have ever run into each other, so it does not appear that any of them have been lost, for want of the necessary means and opportunities of propagation. This evidently depends on the distinction of the sexes, and a proneness in them to continue their kind. Strange! that in so many descents there should never have happened, (if hazard ruled and not wise Providence,) all males of, at least one species, or all females, or that individuals of one sex should not so out-number the other, as to put an end to, at least very much diminish the race; (but we see the contrary in fact;) and that there should have been a never failing determination in the individuals to fulfil their natural law of propagation. The sum is this; these appearances I have mentioned in the animal world, amount to the three following observations of fact, which may be depended on as certain and constant; and let the Atheist, if he can, reconcile them to his beloved chance or blind necessity. First, that there is belonging to every kind of animals, a distinguishing nature, by the direction whereof all the matter  
by

SERM. by which they are nourished, or an addition

II.  is made to their bulk, whether in the womb or out of it, is moulded into their particular and proper form. This *nature* we all acknowledge in the forms of living things. For when any extraordinary production happens, deficient in members, or with super-numerary members, or a situation of them different from what is usual in the kind, we presently call it monstrous and unnatural. *2dly*, The species are preserved by the distinction of sexes in the individuals; and there has been of males and females belonging to the several kinds, in all the generations which have hitherto pass'd, such a proportion, as, all circumstances considered, is best calculated to answer the purpose of perpetuating the species. *3dly*, The propagation thus provided for, depends upon instincts planted in the individuals; and these have always appeared strong enough to answer their end.


If we proceed, in the next place, to consider the principal, but very obvious phænomena of the animal, and especially of the human constitution, *viz.* perception, and activity, with all their modes, in the same view with the frame of the visible world, and the origin and regular propagation of the sensitive kinds; that is, if we consider them only as evidences of intelligence

telligence and design in their production, they S E R M.  
add a force to the argument which, one would II.

think, should appear to an attentive mind irresistible. For surely it can never be imagin'd, with any appearance of reason, that sensation and its different modes, seeing, hearing, &c. spontaneous motion, and the various instincts of animals producing such a regular œconomy in their lives, each individual caring for itself and pursuing its own ends, by the proper use of its powers and organs, and all of the several tribes conspiring together to promote the common good of the whole, so far as their several conditions require; much less that the powers of reason and reflection, the social and moral affections wherewith men are endued, together with the improvements of them in the intire scheme of human life, and human societies, comprehending so much order, contrivance, and various enjoyment; it cannot, I say, be imagin'd, that all these are to be attributed to undesigning necessity or chance.

There is a variety with uniformity and beautiful order, in the sensitive and intellectual, as well as in the material world, which must strike every considerate person with a sense of grand design in its formation. As in the corporeal system, vastly numerous parts, all properly situated and commodiously dispos'd, with an  
apparent

SERM. apparent mutual relation and usefulness, is a

II.  clear demonstration of wise contrivance in the whole; so the no less, perhaps much greater diversity of percipient and active powers, with the different degrees of them, which appears under visible forms, at the same time a regular unchanging similarity in the several species, which could no more proceed from chance, than the variety could from undirected force; and if we add to all this the convenient disposal of them, so that every individual power has a full scope for its exercise, and instead of interfering with each other, there is an apparent mutual correspondence throughout the whole of their state, and a subordination of use, according to the measures of their perfection, the lower still serving the higher, as inanimate nature ministers a constant supply to them all; this is at least an equally invincible proof of design in the author of the system. In short, the animal and rational inhabitants of this globe, even upon a superficial view of them separately, of their natures, capacities and conditions, and the oeconomy which appears in the most obvious face of this living world, carry such irrefragable evidences of design, that, referring to the comparison us'd by some of the ancients, it would be an equal, or even a greater absurdity to resolve these appearances into blind necessity,



necessity, or chance, than to account for the SERM.  
composure of the finest poem, by the necessary II.  
or merely fortuitous jumble of letters. How

strangely is the human understanding capable of being misled by prejudices and prepossessions, so as not to discern the clearest truths?

But if we consider more particularly these principal appearances of the animal life, especially the limited rational faculties of man, the argument will be yet more convincing to prove unoriginated intelligence and activity in the universe. I observ'd before, that by attending to ourselves, and to the report of our senses, concerning external objects, we have the essentially different ideas of percipient and unpercipient beings, of cause and effect, of active and passive powers, or of voluntary agency and necessity, as distinguish'd from it. And now I add, that we cannot avoid observing in ourselves different kinds of perception, namely, sense and understanding. By the *former* we have only the ideas of what are called primary sensible qualities, as extension, solidity, divisibility and figure, and other ideas, such as heat, coldness, colours, sharpness, sweetness, and the like, which our reason tells us, are not in the objects themselves, but perceptions or phantasms rais'd in our minds by the various texture, figure, motion and situation of parts,

5 which

SERM. which are all we can conceive in such beings,

II.

that can produce any effect. Every one of these latter ideas however, takes in the primary sensible qualities; whatever appears to us hot, cold, coloured, &c. appears at the same time extended, divisible and figured. But we find also in our own minds, perceptions of another kind, which take in no ideas of any sensible qualities. By attending to the exercise of our own powers and the various modes of thinking, we have notions, and the knowledge of truths, which have no manner of relation to extension, magnitude, divisibility, figure, or motion. But the other and lower, even the sentient principle, opens to us a scene in nature different from the curious and beautiful fabric of the heavens, the earth, and all other inanimate effects. For *they* require nothing besides unactive and unintelligent matter for the subject of them, tho' they lead us to the acknowledgment of wisdom and design in the directing and disposing cause; but *here* seems to be in the effect itself a superior order of being, having properties and powers of a kind intirely different; and this seems to be in all the various sorts of animals, in some degree or other, some of them being more, some less perfectly sensitive. It is true, we can't know what passes in brutes, as we do what passes in our own minds:

Yet

Yet when we consider their organs in the ex-<sup>SERM.</sup>  
terior form, and in the anatomy of them, ve-<sup>II.</sup>  
ry much resembling our own; and when we

consider the effects which follow the presenting, and the application of material objects to them, very like those which appear in us on the same occasion, we cannot well avoid concluding, that they have the external senses of hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting and smelling, in common with us, and the like perception of sensible qualities as we have. Some philosophers have represented them as mere machines; and the whole œconomy of their senses and operations, as if it were no more than a curious piece of clock-work, form'd with exquisite art. But this notion is deservedly exploded; for indeed the obvious appearances can never be accounted for by any mechanical hypothesis.

But let us consider the sensitive powers as we find them in ourselves; and though they are the lower part of our nature, far less excellent than some other faculties of the human mind, yet they seem to be of quite another kind and original, and of a higher nature than the gross corporeal part, or any of its organs; indeed higher than any naturally incogitative and unactive being is capable of, at least, without the interposition of a superior designing Agent. If now we have found a being, nay,

SERM. a multitude of beings in the world, essentially

II. distinguish'd from others by the peculiar powers of perception, exercis'd in a variety of modes, this must overthrow all the *Atheistical* hypotheses. For their necessary mechanical causes in an infinite series, and atoms by a fortuitous motion compounding and diversifying themselves into various forms, are wholly insufficient to produce such effects. But this particular appearance leads us directly to acknowledge something resembling it, rather superior to it, that is understanding in the author. For can any one imagine, that a blind undefining cause could have produc'd perception, distinguish'd into so many kinds, as of colours, sounds, pain, pleasure, &c. all united in one undivided principle? This perceptive faculty is a low image of intelligence, which is very reasonably attributed to a free intending Agent, who may, himself possess'd of perfect power and wisdom, communicate various degrees of those perfections to his works, as he sees fit; but can never with any pretence of reason, be accounted for by chance or necessity, or by any unperceiving cause; especially considering it as an abiding principle, uniformly subservient to certain ends, subsisting in a regular diversity of outwards forms, and in a great variety of degrees.

This will be still more evident, if we con- SERM.  
sider in conjunction with sense, that other II.  
principal appearance of the animal life, spontaneous motion. We know that inanimate things at rest, necessarily continue so, till they are moved by a force superior to their own power of resistance: But animal bodies, either the whole, or particular members of them, change their posture, begin to move or continue in motion, by an inward activity and voluntary self-determination. This, one would think, should be a very surprizing phænomenon to the *Atheist*, who denies the existence of an original active Cause. But how does he get rid of the difficulty? Why, he roundly denies any such thing as self-motion; and alleges, that all which looks like it in animal action, is the mere effect of the inward agitation of the machine, raised by the impulse of external objects on the organs of sense. But to this account the fact does not at all agree; as every one may be easily satisfied by his own observation. Tho' 'tis true that in our sensations we are passive, and they necessarily arise, according to an establish'd law, by the impression which certain objects make upon us; we cannot avoid the perception of pleasure and pain upon some occasions, nor the hearing of sounds and seeing of colours, when the



SERM. organs are duly dispos'd, and these sensations

II. are necessarily attended with some motions in the animal system; yet for the actions which are called voluntary, we know, that, as they are never properly caused, they are often not so much as occasioned by the impulse of external objects. Is not every man conscious to himself that he moves his hands, his feet and other parts of his body, by the sole command of his will, frequently when there is no impulse at all from without exciting him to it; and that the proper agent in such cases is the same conscious self, which is intimately present in all parts of the body, perceiving the impressions which are made upon it by its organs of sense? We cannot indeed explain the nature and manner of this operation, nor would the exactest knowledge we can attain of the animal œconomy enable us to understand it. For tho' a learn'd anatomist may describe the muscles, and shew their convenient situation, fitting them by their contractions to move the several members; yet how the act of the soul contracts those muscles, how it directs the course of the animal spirits, or influences whatever are the nearest and most immediate instruments of the animal motion;—this he is as ignorant of, as the most unskilful rustic. But this they equally know, and all mankind

mankind know it by an inward consciousness, SERM.  
which is the surest evidence, that the motion II.  
takes its rise from, being constantly and uni-  
formly produc'd by, a self-determining power  
within.

Here then is a plain familiar example, directing us to form an idea of a mind acting upon matter, a percipient, self-determining principle, moving bodies only by a volition. By this the supreme first Mover has left us a witness within ourselves, which confounds the cavils of *Atheism*. Shall it be said, that the whole system of the universe, and all it contains, is to be resolv'd into mechanism, without a directing immechanical principle: that the being of such a principle, which is the spring of thought and active operations on unthinking matter, is unintelligible, and that no motion can be conceiv'd to be effected but by a material impulse? All this, which *Atheists* call absurd, is exemplified in that little system, a single animal. Shall we not acknowledge that he who form'd this percipient self-determining power, the ruler of the body which it inhabits, yet unknowing how it exercises its dominion; that he, I say, is possess'd of superior intelligence and power? And is it not easily conceivable, that such intelligence and power may have a command over large ma-  
D 3 terial

SERM. organs are duly dispos'd, and these sensations

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SERM.terial systems? This animal life, tho' far more

II. excellent than inanimate nature, which yet is none of it without the characters of the author's perfections stamp'd upon it, gives us but a faint notion of the Deity: Let us rise to something higher, and which carries in it a brighter and more illustrious image of the divine understanding.

What I mean, are the intellectual powers of the human nature, far transcending the sensitive, both in the excellence of their kind, and the extent of their exercise. When sense and understanding perceive the same object, it is after a very different manner. The former discerns what we call the sensible qualities of material objects; that is, those objects, by effluvia from them, or by the intervention of some corporeal medium, make such impressions on our organs, as are the occasion of exciting certain ideas in the mind; and here the capacity of sense terminates, it can go no further. But we are conscious of another power which can review those ideas, examine their nature and relations, and, by comparing them together, discover truths concerning them, which the merely animal capacity does not reach to. For example; when a coloured object is presented to us, the idea of red, white, black, or any other colour is rais'd: Here the report of sense stops,



stops, and many unattentive persons, too hastily forming a judgment upon it, conclude that these are qualities really inherent in the bodies themselves. But upon a more close attention and careful enquiry, others are satisfied that they are really no more than our own sensations, caused by some particular disposition of parts in the surface of the coloured body, giving such a determination to the rays of light, that they form those images in the organs of sight, which are the nearer object of our perception. Our reasoning in this and many other instances upon sense, shows a power superior to *it* in the mind, which apprehends the same objects after a quite different manner. We have thoughts concerning them, which sense could never have suggested; we consider their relations, their similitude and dissimilitude; we form general notions, wherein the mind abstracts from individual existence, which the sensitive faculty is not capable of; we discern the agreement or disagreement of our own ideas, their connexion and dependence; we form propositions upon them, affirming and denying, distinguishing between truth and falsehood, and having clearly perceiv'd some truths, we proceed in our search after more, by consideration and arguing. Now, tho' the occasion of all these and other modes of

SERM.  
II.

SERM. thinking, may be introduc'd by the senses,

II. every one who attends, must be convinced, that the exercise of the mind in them is very different from sensation.

But there are other objects of the understanding, not deriv'd either immediately or remotely from the senses. Consciousness is no image or representation of any thing without : That clear intuitive knowledge we have of our being and our own powers, with all their various exercises and acts, (such as perceptions of every kind, sensations, reflections, remembrance, judgment, reasoning, self-determinations, affections, desire, fear, hope, sorrow, joy ;) all these are accompanied with a consciousness in the mind, which does not nor possibly can proceed from any eternal object ; for an external object can only imprint something of itself, nothing at all of the inward active discerning self. Besides, the sensation we are now considering, as different from, and inferior to understanding, still takes in the qualities of passive matter, extension, divisibility, figure, &c. but there are other ideas in the mind as real and distinct, which do not represent extended, figured, divisible substance, nor have the least relation to any of its properties or modifications ; such as the ideas of virtue, of honesty, benevolence, gratitude, justice,

justice, compassion, which have no manner of affinity with sensible qualities, yet are of great importance to the purposes of our being, the objects of strong affection, and a consciousness of them yields the most solid and substantial pleasure to the soul. We reason upon them as clearly, perceive truths concerning them, and draw consequences, in which the mind rests as much satisfied of their evidence, as in its knowledge of the figures, gravity and other affections of matter. And thus it plainly appears, that there are in the human soul intellectual powers, superior to, and different from the sensitive, both in respect of the objects about which they are conversant, and the nature and manner of their exercise, when the objects are the same.

SERM.  
II.

If it be so, we have a more clear discovery than the animal powers can give us, of self-original intelligence in the universe. For, either the understandings we find ourselves possess'd of must be eternal and unoriginated, which no mortal ever imagined, or they must be originally derived from an intelligent Author, to whom these characters belong.

The reasoning of *Socrates* on this subject seems to be very strong and convincing, as it is related by *Xenophon* \*. After he had endeavoured

\* Memorab. Socrat. Lib. 1.

SERM. deavoured to prove the wisdom of the Deity by

II. the beautiful order of the material world, and particularly the frame of the human body, he argues to this purpose,—That as every man is conscious of a mind, an intelligent principle within him, he is thereby led to acknowledge understanding in the world without him. For, as in the composition of our bodies, there is deriv'd to us a part, and but a very small part of the solid, the liquid, and other ingredients, in the mighty mass of surrounding matter, it would be very strange, if reason, which is our highest excellence, should come to us by some lucky chance from nothing, or no intelligent cause; and that there should be no such thing originally in the universe or the whole of being, when yet we see the plain marks of it in the orderly disposition of all things.

The Stoics us'd just the same reasoning; and added, that as in the human constitution, so in the intire system of things, the whole is more excellent than a particular part; that it would be extreme vanity in mankind to fancy themselves the head of the universe, being indeed but a very small part of it; and that which comprehends and presides over all, must have in itself all absolute perfection, from which every real perfection scattered through the world is derived.

It

It was a received maxim among the an-SERM.  
cients, but very differently understood, that II.

Nothing can come from Nothing. Not to enter into the consideration of the use which *Atheists* made of it against the creation of matter, which our present argument does not require, the maxim in this sense is most certainly true, that nothing can be produc'd, without a sufficient cause in order of nature before it; and that no real \* perfection can be in the effect, which is not in the cause, either actually or virtually: For if it were, that perfection would be produc'd without a cause, or by nothing, which is a direct contradiction. Now, applying this to the point before us, the question is, how came intelligence into the world, if not from an intelligent cause? The *Atheist* may, if he pleases, ridicule what we call perfection; for indeed his principles tend to level all things, and destroy the beautiful subordination which there is in nature; but

\* The word Perfection is here used, as it is commonly, without explication. For understanding it the better, and to prevent mistakes, we may observe, that as the human mind cannot avoid discerning a difference in things, it as necessarily, upon comparison, prefers some to others. The measure of this preference in our judgment, is the sense we have of natural and moral Good. By perfection therefore is meant, a capacity of enjoyment, or a capacity of virtue, which we can't help apprehending real, and valuable in the degree wherein it is possess'd; and where it has the plain appearances of an effect, we can't help apprehending, as in all other effects, an equal or superior capacity is the Cause.



SERM. but it is surprizing, that any one possess'd of

II.

~ rational powers should think so meanly of them. Is there nō excellence in conscious thinking, with all its various modes; in reasoning; in the discernment of truth, and an intellectual progress in discovering it; in the exercise of liberty by a rational self-determination, and of our best affections, with the various enjoyment they afford; is there, I say, no excellence in all this above the qualities of passive unintelligent beings? But though I think the human mind can scarcely help acknowledging a superior excellence in the intellectual and moral capacity, far surpassing the powers of incogitative and merely passive being, which therefore must owe itself to a superior intelligent cause; yet waving this consideration, 'tis impossible to doubt of the thing itself, that there actually is what we call understanding in man. Let us see then, if the rise of it can be accounted for without a prior intelligence as its cause. Supposing, tho' ever so absurdly, all the appearances of corporeal nature not to require, to their being and their order, the direction of any designing Agent, but that their magnitude, figure, and all other qualities, proceed from unguided moving force, or the fortuitous jumble of their compounding parts; the question is, if intelligence

gence with all its modes is thus also to be explained, and if it has been struck out in the same necessary or casual manner? And any attentive person will be convinc'd, that this solution is altogether insufficient, and indeed extremely unreasonable. For all the visible phænomena of inanimate nature, whatever diversity there may be in their exterior appearance, carry the marks of their internal constitution, having still inseparably belonging to them, the essential properties and primary qualities of that whereof they are compounded, such as solidity, divisibility, figure, its capacity of motion and rest, to which it is in its own nature indifferent, not capable of itself, to change its state from either to the other, but always yielding to force; intelligence can never be the result of these, any or all of them, or any composition or change of them. For let magnitude, figure and motion be ever so much altered, compounded or divided, they can really produce nothing but magnitude, figure and motion: But perception and consciousness have no relation to these; our ideas of them are as distinct as any can possibly be. What resemblance has consciousness to motion or figure? Or, by an attentive consideration, must not every one perceive, that reasoning and volition have not the least

SERM. least affinity with magnitude or divisibility?

II. And if, by the most apparent distinction of our own ideas, we may not conclude a real difference of things, there is an end of all certainty, and our knowledge is reduc'd to utter confusion.

The secondary qualities of passive unintelligent being, such as colours, sounds, tastes, resulting from the various texture, disposition, and motion of its parts; (and our adversaries may suppose that all perceptions arise in the same manner as they do;) these secondary qualities, I say, are really no more than our own sensations, not the modes of external objects but of thought, requiring themselves a peculiar principle for the subject of them, and therefore a superior power to produce them; consequently, instead of being an argument to show that understanding might possibly take its rise from unthinking matter and its modifications, they really serve the quite contrary purpose. If ever there had been nothing in the world but passive matter and motion, however compounded and diversified, not only there never could have been any such thing as consciousness, but indeed there never could have been so much as colour, sound and taste, since these are only modes of perception, and therefore peculiar to beings indued with a perceptive power, which could only  
be

be produc'd by an agent himself percipient, SERM.  
either in that or a more perfect manner. II.

Wherefore the reasoning related in *Cicero*\*,  
is extremely weak, when in opposition to *Socrates's* argument already mentioned, *viz.*  
whence did we derive our reason, if there be  
no such thing in the world, it is alledged one  
may as well ask, whence had we numbers,  
musick or speech?—And again, if the argu-  
ment be good, that because there is under-  
standing in us, therefore it must be originally  
in the world, by the same argument it may  
be prov'd, that the superior intelligent in the  
world, must be an orator, a mathematician,  
and a philosopher. Nor is their reasoning any  
better who pretend, that if life and under-  
standing in the effect require life and under-  
standing in the cause, whereby we find our-  
selves oblig'd to acknowledge these powers  
eternal and unmade, by the same argument it  
may be prov'd, that sensible qualities must  
be attributed to the original Cause, and there  
must be, for example, an eternal unmade red  
and green. The answer to all which is very  
obvious, that none of these qualities men-  
tioned require to their being, any thing di-  
stinct from the animal and rational powers with  
their proper exercise; and therefore it is by no  
means

\* De natura Deorum, Lib. 3.



SERM. means necessary to suppose, that they belong

II. to the original author of them: Whereas life and understanding, indeed the lowest perceptions, imply a perfection which passive unperceptient powers, merely of themselves, can never reach to; and therefore they must be produc'd by another cause, to which either they formally, or a superior excellence must be ascrib'd. Upon the whole then it is apparent, that the secondary qualities of corporeal nature, as they are called, being really and properly no more than modes of perception, not the particular application of the human faculties, as in singing, speech and philosophy; I say, that none of these have any thing parallel to the case of intelligence, to weaken the force of the argument from its being in the world to prove that it must be eminently in the cause of it. But least of all is there any pretence for alledging, that from our reasoning it may be inferr'd, that the cause of passive matter must have its properties, such as figure, divisibility, &c. as well as that the cause of intelligence must be intelligent. For daily experience shews, in numberless instances, that intelligence produces effects very unlike itself, and of a quite different nature; whereas not only no instance can be alledg'd to show that figure, divisibility, &c. ever did produce conscious



scious intelligence, but it is impossible that SERM.  
II.  
ever they should. For, as has been observ'd,

extended divisible matter, with all its changes and modifications, can never produce any thing to which these its essential properties do not inseparably belong; therefore not intelligence.

In this reasoning I have abstracted from the question concerning the possibility of matter's being endued with thinking and active faculties, which some wise men have thought too difficult for us to determine; alledging, that the human understanding does not so thoroughly comprehend the nature of thought and of corporeal substance, as to be able to judge with certainty, that the latter may not, by the power of God, be made the subject of the other; tho' they agree that matter, with its passive powers and all its known properties, could never possibly of itself have produc'd any degree of intelligence and activity. This is what I have asserted, and therefore that the human, rational, and self-determining faculties, whatever the subject of them be, could not possibly proceed from unintelligent matter and motion, or the fortuitous concurrence of atoms, which is all that *Atheists* mean, or that, I conceive, can be meant by undesigning necessity or chance; consequently, that active intelligence must be self-original in nature. Nay,

SERM. if we should suppose that there is no substance

II. distinct from body, and that the Deity himself is corporeal, if it be allow'd that he is the intelligent Cause of all things, this as truly overthrows the cause of *Atheism*, as the juster principle of his eternal spiritual nature. Some *Atheists* have been so sensible of this insuperable difficulty which presses their scheme, namely, to account for the rise of thought from unthinking matter, without the agency of a designing Cause, that rather than abandon their fundamental principle, that there is nothing in the universe but mere matter with its modifications, they have fled to that most absurd hypothesis, that all matter and every single atom of it, is intelligent: which, not to mention any more reasons, other *Atheists* themselves have refuted by this invincible one, —that then every living intelligent being, particularly every man would be, not a single person or intelligent agent, but a multitude or a system of them, contrary to what every one is conscious of. But the opinion of the Atomists is, if possible, yet more extravagant; who from the figure, magnitude and motion of parts, confessedly void of sense and understanding, would raise perception and consciousness, essentially different from all modes and compositions of magnitude, figure and motion; which

which is to suppose a real and distinct perfect- SERM.  
tion to be produc'd out of nothing, or with- II.  
out a cause.

It may be objected against all this, that if from the order and harmony of the visible world, and from a multitude of sensitive and rational beings, we justly infer a designing Cause; supposing this to be true, and that order and harmony, intelligence and activity are in the divine mind, what is the reason of this? And may we not prove by the same argument, that *it* must be attributed to a prior cause? I answer, our argument is not, that of every thing which has being, or which is wise and good, there must be a cause; but that, as in all other cases, by various marks of contrivance in any work, the human mind is naturally led to acknowledge an intending author; so in this case, by the clear evidences of design in a numberless variety of instances, even all parts of the known universe, the inanimate, the sensitive and the rational, we find ourselves oblig'd to recognise an understanding and designing Cause. And here we may rest. If there be an intelligent Author of universal nature and of all the appearances we can discern in the whole world, of their mutual relations, connexions and dependencies, he is the God for whom we enquire. A search after unseen Causes of unseen

SERM. Causes to infinity, can discover nothing but  
 II. perplexity and confusion of thought. The  
 intelligent fountain of all the wisdom, all the  
 good and the order which actually is in the  
 universe, will appear to every impartial mind  
 worthy of our highest veneration and esteem,  
 and justly intitled to our love and confidence.

But with respect to a first Cause, it is acknowledged by *Attheists*, as well as by us, that something must have been from eternity, self-existent and independent: Accordingly they say, that the material world form'd as it is, or matter and motion, or bare matter, is that necessarily existing thing. I shall not now enter into the consideration of this point, but I hope in its proper place, to shew that designing active mind has of all things the best pretensions; nay, that it alone has any just pretensions to the characters of necessarily existent, self-original and independent.

Upon a review of this whole reasoning, and indeed of the intire opposite schemes of *Theism* and *Attheism*, with regard to the points which have been consider'd, this remarkable difference appears; that whereas there is a great diversity of beings in the universe, and a great variety of qualities, powers and perfections belonging to the several kinds of them, the *Attheistic* opinion makes the very lowest of all; namely,  
 sense-



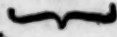
senseless passive matter, the first principle of all, SERM.  
the eternal self-existent being, from which, as II.  
the sole independent origin, all things, even the  
most regular and beautiful arose, nay, the highest perfection of intelligence, virtue and happiness, without an active designing Cause. For which reason that hypothesis is incumber'd with insuperable difficulties in every step of the scale of being. It cannot account for any thing but by chance or necessity, which in respect of causality are really nothing; and as propos'd to the human understanding for a reason, only signify ignorance. It cannot so much as account for the order of the world; the exact proportion of its parts and the harmony of the whole; the apparent mutual relations of the heavens and the earth, as united in one system; the convenient situation of the earth with respect to its distance from the sun, and such a proper direction both of its diurnal and annual motions as in the best manner to provide for the comfortable subsistence of its numerous inhabitants; the formation of the animal life in such a variety of species, all preserv'd distinct and without confusion, and propagated by a settled law, each fitted to its own element, provided with proper food and with suitable instincts and organs, especially sensation and self-motion, the principal appearances of the sensitive life; and



SERM. least of all can the *Atbeistical* hypothesis account for conscious intelligence and the various modes of it, which it diminishes into a vain empty shadow, the merely accidental result of the figure and motion of matter, tho' it is that which makes every man *Himself*, and therefore nothing can appear to him more real and substantial.

II

But the doctrine of Deity and Providence is the perfect reverse of all this, and explains the system of the universe in a consistent satisfactory manner. It represents intelligence as the first of things, the origin and cause of all derived beings, and by the help of its direction, sets all things in a fair and amiable light. An eternal self-existent mind, immutably possess'd of all absolute perfections, form'd the plan of the world, and wisely finish'd it, according to its own most perfect model. It was to be expected that the work of such an architect should bear the signature of his hand, that is, his counsel and power in its magnificence, variety, proportion and beautiful harmony; and so it does. The low dark outworks of this stately building, that is the whole mass of extended passive bulk, in itself so mean and contemptible, is form'd into various beauty, by the energy of Spirit which inhabits it. From this there is a gradual ascent towards the utmost height  
of

of excellence, and every rising step in the scale SERM.  
carries in it a growing display of original per- II.  
fection. Vegetation itself is a vast improve- 

ment upon dead matter, showing the superior plastic virtue of spirit; but animal sensation and spontaneity, however low in comparison, are strong images of understanding and activity. Human intelligence, with its various powers, exercises, and enjoyments, is the highest in our world, and leads us directly to the great Original it was form'd by, the uncreated mind; Between these two there is a mighty chasm, and we may well imagine many intermediate orders of celestial spirits, superior to us, tho' the highest of them at an immense distance from unoriginated excellence.

Let any candid attentive person set these schemes against each other in his calm deliberate thoughts, and embrace that which appears the most rational. I do not doubt but you will be convinc'd the latter is the very truth, in which your minds may rest with intire satisfaction. Let us therefore join in adoring the glorious fountain of light and life, and with all the wise inhabitants of heaven and earth, acknowledge him *worthy to receive glory, and honour, and power, who has created all things, and for his pleasure they are and were created.*  
Amen.

## S E R M O N III.

The Being of God prov'd from Human  
Intelligence and Morality.

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Rom. i. 19, 20.

*Because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.*

SERM. III. **I** HAVE endeavoured in two preceding discourses to prove the Being of God from his works, that is, as the question is properly stated between the *Atheists* and us, to prove an active intelligence in the formation of the universe. Indeed the existence of the very lowest things we see, the most contemptible pebble or clod of earth, cannot be accounted for without the agency of an intelligent and powerful Cause; much less this beautiful system of the world, dispos'd in such exquisite order, and having its parts so exactly fitted to

to each other, as to make up one regular whole. SERM.

But above all, that understanding which we are conscious of in ourselves, even constrains III.

us to acknowledge the supreme eternal Mind as its Author. For if inanimate matter form'd into a system, discovers his glorious wisdom and activity, much more his own living image in our perceptive and self-determining powers. This last well deserves a more particular consideration, as containing a peculiarly illustrious manifestation of the divine wisdom; and I hope, by a due attention of what passes, in our own minds, we shall find ourselves obliged to recognize the All-ruling intelligence of our Maker, and to adore him who *is perfect in knowledge*. At least, supposing the former reasoning to be just, what I shall further offer upon this subject, will give us a more enlarged idea of the divine understanding, which is the principal point in our present inquiry.

Here I shall confine myself to what is called pure intellection, that is, those exercises of the mind which abstract wholly from the external senses, and the sole object of them, singular corporeal existence. For tho', as I observ'd before, the sensitive and intellectual powers are employ'd about the same object, apprehending it in a very different manner, yet are there intelligibles, indeed those of the sublimest kind, in which we have the greatest certainty



**SERM.** certainty of knowledge, as well as the noblest

**III.** mental entertainment, which do not at all  
 fall under the perception of the senses; such  
 as the abstract ideas of natures or essences,  
 eternal truths and moral qualities, which have  
 all of them, tho' no sensible existence, yet  
 an important reality, and the ideas of them in  
 the eternal mind are their original archetypes.

First, Abstract Natures or Essences are represented by some as the mere creatures of the human understanding, taking occasion from the apparent similitude and dissimilitude of things to form abstract notions of their several different kinds, which no where subsist but in the understanding itself; at the same time referring to the internal constitutions of things, the true cause of the apparent similitude and dissimilitude of their outward forms. These internal constitutions are the real Essences, for the most part unknown to us; and the essences which are the objects of our apprehension, are therefore called nominal, because the true interior nature of things, whereby they are what they are, complete in themselves and invariably distinct from all others, lie too deep for us to discover. Now tho' this may be a fair representation of the method in which the human understanding proceeds, and the true origin of its ideas of Essences, (which being posterior to individual existence,



existence, and derived from it, can be no more perfect than our knowledge of individual existing things) yet it leads us by clear reasoning to conclude, that there is a more perfect knowledge of Essences, which abstracting from actual existence, can only subsist as ideas in a mind, but it must be a mind infinitely more perfect than ours.

SERM.  
III.

To shew this, I shall take leave to borrow an observation from a celebrated author, who gives the very account of Essences which I have been mentioning\*. He tells us, that we know the Essences, and distinguish the species of artificial things, with far less confusion and uncertainty than natural things, because an artificial thing being a production of man, which the artificer design'd, and well knows the idea of, the name of it is suppos'd to stand for no other idea, nor to import any other Essence than what is certainly to be known, and easy enough to be apprehended. He might have said, that every sensible Artificer must perfectly know the real essence of his own work, so far as it is his own, however ignorant he may be of the nature of the materials, stones, timber, iron, silver, gold, or whatever they are, which another intirely unacquainted with the mechanic art, may understand much better; yet the proper disposition

\* *Locke's Essay on Human Understanding, Book III. Ch. VI.*

SERM. position of the parts, and joining them fitly together, so as to make one compleat fabric or machine, which is his own work, he must know; and his understanding reaches to a thorough comprehension of the design, which is its true essence, before he begins the manual operation. Now applying this to the great Artificer of nature, *who stretch'd out the heavens by his wisdom, and establish'd the earth by his discretion*, we must conclude, that since he was the intending Cause of the world, and exercis'd active intelligence in the formation of all things, the plan was form'd in his All-comprehending mind. In other words, the design or the archetypal ideas of the true Essence of things, subsisted in his understanding before the things themselves actually had a being: for who can imagine such an inconsistency as intelligence in the operation and not in the intention? Can a work be made with wisdom, and wisdom not be prior to it, or the parts of a structure so put together as to shew wise contrivance, without the Agent's having laid a scheme before-hand, and formed a model by which his proceeding should be directed?

But further we must conceive in a designing cause, freedom and choice, especially in a complicated production, which comprehends  
a great

a great variety of parts. One general end is to SERM.  
be obtain'd, taking in many which are subor- III.


ordinate ; a vast variety of means are presented to the mind, the fittest of which are to be chosen, and the rest rejected. This to imperfect understandings is the cause of long deliberation upon their projects ; they take time to compare the means which offer themselves to their thoughts ; and try which, upon the whole, as far as they can judge, are the most convenient ; but without a plurality of such means or parts, we can have no notion of wisdom exercis'd in the work, for it consists in a choice or preference of the best and fittest. Now when we survey the world, so much of it as is known to us, (how extensive actual existence is beyond our sight or the reach of our understandings we cannot possibly tell,) containing such a multitude of beings as cannot be numbered, all form'd and dispos'd with intelligence and design, shewing that the ideas of them subsisted before in the mind of the author ; what a vast variety of ideas, (we lose ourselves in imagining it,) must we suppose to have been in the same understanding, that there might be room for that preference, which we cannot help thinking, is absolutely necessary to the exercise of wisdom in his works? No one can say the world  
could

SERM. could not possibly have been otherwise than it

III. is, or any of its parts otherwise than they are, in this sense that it would imply a contradiction in the nature of things. For that is in effect to deny all free agency, and all wisdom in the formation of the world; which is, I think, already prov'd by convincing arguments. But if that the world could not be otherwise than it is, supposes intelligence, and therefore means that of all possible systems appearing to his own mind, the Creator chose that which in the whole, was the fittest and the best;—This necessarily implies what I just now said, namely, that other models or designs were equally in his power, and all alike actually in the view of his understanding, prior, I do not say in time, but in our order of conceiving, to the determination of producing the system which now actually exists. This seems to be the true meaning of *Plato's* ideas, which he represents as the original forms and exemplars of whatever is in being; that is, the conceptions of the divine most perfect intellect, in which the whole scheme of existence was laid; tho' some of the latter *Platonists* turned his doctrine to an absurdity, (and perhaps he gave too great occasion to it himself,) calling those ideas not only archetypes and patterns, but living substances and physical



cal causes, nay, a sort of deities. Here then **SERM.**  
we find in the universe, not only intelligence, **III.**  
directing the frame of nature, finishing all the  
particular forms in it, and appointing them  
their proper places, disposing the whole circle  
of being, and guiding the intire series of causes,  
with their operations; but an understanding  
not limited by the universe itself, reaching to  
the utmost bounds of possibility, and compre-  
hending all conceivable essences or intelligible  
forms, relations, connexions and dependencies  
of things.

2dly, As these abstract ideas appearing to  
our minds, are the materials of all our science  
which is not conversant about singular exist-  
ence, and in proportion as they are discerned  
by every mind, they are the materials of its  
knowledge; so upon comparing them results  
Truth, (for it consists in their agreement,)   
which is another real and important object of  
the understanding. Our minds are made with  
a desire to discover truth, and they rest in it  
when found, with great satisfaction; tho' our  
knowledge of essences is very imperfect, and  
what we call the essences of natural things  
actually existent, that is, our own abstract  
ideas of them, are for the most part little  
more than nominal; yet the perception of  
their agreement is to us certain truth, and we  
acquiesce



SERM. acquiesce in it with pleasure: But that mind

III. which thoroughly comprehends the real natures of things, having form'd them with all their properties and powers, must see an infinity of truths in their various relations, which we cannot discern. Let it be especially observ'd, that our principal and most satisfying knowledge is purely intellectual, the subject of it being our own ideas, which abstract intirely from existence. For example, the points, lines and figures which are the subject of mathematical demonstration, are not perceived by our senses, nor supposed to have a sensible existence, but only are our own ideas abstracting from all matter, really form'd, or imagin'd to be form'd into such figures; those straight lines, curves, triangles, squares and other figures, whose properties, mutual relations, equalities and proportions are demonstrated, perhaps could none of them exactly, certainly some of them could not be exemplified in bulky materials, nor do the demonstrations concerning them depend on that, the subject of them being only our own ideas; yet no man who understands them will say they are chimerical, since he sees real truth in them, to which he cannot refuse his assent: nor can it be reasonably said that they depend wholly on the mind, and are its arbitrary combina-

tions

tions of its own ideas; for it cannot make truth or falshood, but must consider them as independent on its own pleasure, and equally real whether it discerns them or not. It remains then that geometrical theorems and other propofitions, (for I mention them only as examples,) are eternal verities, the fame at all times, and, as fome of the ancients fpeak, ingenerable and incorruptible, alike true whether any human mind perceives them or not, nay whether any human mind exifts or not. But were thefe eternal neceffary truths altogether unknown before any human mind exifted? No, they were the proper objects of eternal neceffary intelligence, fubfifting in the eternal mind. The occafion of our difcerning them is taken from the works of God; it is from corporeal beings we get the ideas of figures and numbers; (tho' the abftract ideas we form of them, are not fenfible but intellectual,) and the fame may be faid concerning the fubjects of other felf-evident, or demonftrated propofitions. Now has God fcattered over his works fuch traces of intelligence, that very imperfect obfervers are led by them to fee, and be delighted with truth, and fhall himfelf not difcern that fame truth? Nay, muft he not have difcern'd it from everlafting, fince from everlafting it was equally difcernable by a per-

SERM.  
III.

SERMON. perfect understanding, which comprehended the  
III. essences, that is, the ideas of things with all  
their relations, whence that truth necessarily  
results? Surely we have no mental perfection  
but what is derived from the eternal Mind,  
the Father of our spirits. If then we are en-  
dued with a power of discovering truth, (which  
we cannot reflect upon without having plea-  
sure in it, as an excellence in our nature,) he  
must have possess'd that power in a more emi-  
nent and perfect manner before we had a be-  
ing, and the truths which were eternally  
knowable, must be to him eternally known.  
Human science lies within a narrow compass,  
but certainly it is one of the most delightful  
entertainments the mind can have. What  
pleasure does it give to some at least, to see  
a proposition demonstrated, which compre-  
hends, and to full conviction determines the  
relation of a great variety of things, for ex-  
ample, the proportion of many different lines  
or figures? And can we imagine that our na-  
ture, in every part of its constitution carry-  
ing the plainest marks of understanding and  
design, could be made with a sense of beauty  
in such truths, and yet the designing Author  
of that nature, be ignorant of them? Thus  
we behold the divine wisdom manifested in  
the intelligible as well as the sensible world,  
and

and by some sketches of eternal truth, which we ourselves are enabled to discern with delight, we have not only clear evidence that the first of Beings, the original Cause of all things, is himself intelligent, but are led to a more enlarged view of what is the agreeable, tho' to us incomprehensible object of his eternal contemplation.

SERM.  
III.  
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3dly, This will still more fully appear, if we consider moral qualities and truths, which evidently appear to our minds, and are of the greatest importance to the ends of our being. Without entring into the detail of these qualities and truths, which may be suppos'd to be so far known as is necessary to our present purpose, I shall only make the following observations concerning them. First, That they are intirely abstracted from the external senses and their objects. Other animals which have those senses in common with us, give no discovery of their having any notions of morality; and are not reckon'd moral agents, which is the highest and peculiar character of rational beings. How could the external senses lead us to any sentiments of virtue, which has not the least relation to any qualities of matter, either primary or secondary? What resemblance have justice and benevolence to the figure and motion of bodies, or what affinity

SERM. with colours, sounds or tastes? Nor indeed

III. do the ends of sensitive life require so sublime  
 a sense as that of morality; the preservation of individuals and of the kind, and their usefulness to other species of beings in their manner, which are its highest apparent purposes; these ends, I say, are all answered by lower instincts.

2dly, Moral qualities, which have no other subject than the affections of the soul, and actions proceeding from them, tho' intirely independent on matter and all its properties, are yet real, and necessarily regarded by our mind as such. A sense of moral beauty and deformity in human characters and actions, is as natural as a sense of another kind of beauty and deformity in corporeal forms; nay, our minds as necessarily perceive a difference between cruelty and mercy, gratitude and ingratitude, temperance and debauchery, as between light and darkness, sweet and bitter, harmony and discord, which we distinguish by our external senses. The idea of virtue, whether in ourselves or others, is always accompanied with approbation, and vice with dislike. An excellent moral character constantly attracts our esteem, and a vicious one cannot be consider'd otherwise than with aversion; a beneficent action is applauded, and a cruel one



one condemned, abstracting from any advantage or disadvantage to ourselves arising from either. We review virtuous dispositions in our own hearts, and virtuous works flowing from them, with the highest satisfaction, and the contrary are unavoidably attended with remorse. It is true, that there is a great variety in the practice of virtue, which in some instances is attended with embarrassing circumstances, and in our present state there are many things to divert our attention from it. On these accounts and because of negligence, corrupt customs, the prejudices of education, and particularly false notions of religion, some may have far less knowledge of virtue than others, and the virtuous affections may be weaker in them; but a sense of morality, (capable indeed of more or less improvement, according to our opportunities and the degrees of our attention and diligence,) seems to be indelibly imprinted on our nature, so that we can no more divest ourselves of it altogether, than we can put off humanity itself.

3dly, As moral qualities, and truths concerning them, are real, and necessarily regarded by our minds, so they are of the greatest importance to the happiness of mankind. This I have hinted already with respect to particular persons; having observ'd that the peace

SERM. and satisfaction of their minds depends, in a great

III. measure, upon an inward consciousness of virtuous dispositions, and the designed regulation of their conduct by them. I believe every man will find by experience, that he is not able wholly to extinguish his sentiments of morality, nor without the utmost violence to obscure and weaken them so, but that his heart will condemn him for his crimes; nor can he arrive to an unmanly ease in his vices, 'till after a long course of affected stupidity and sottish infatuation; which is reproachful to the rational nature, and takes away the truest self-enjoyment. How unhappy are wicked men by their wickedness? What a train of miseries and misfortunes in the present state, arise from debauchery and sensual excesses; from fraud and violence? But if there be intelligence in framing the human nature, and appointing the condition of men, it must extend to the whole kind. And indeed morality may be therefore pronounced important to our natures, because it does not only in a sensible manner affect the interest of single persons, but the greatest collective bodies of them, nay, the intire species. Let any one imagine the whole human race to be without the least sense of virtue, of the fear of God, of good-will to mankind, of the excellence of honesty, gratitude,

titude, fidelity, temperance, and the turpitude of the contrary, so that there should be nothing left but the fear of personal outward danger and inconveniencies to prevent the most licentious rage of unruly destructive passions, and all the mischiefs they could produce; how miserable, upon such a supposition, would our state be? It may be reasonably question'd whether the kind could have subsisted so long, or any remain'd to have inhabited the earth; but at least it is certain, life must have been a dull, uncomfortable, inelegant and insipid thing, in comparison of what it now actually is, unadorned with those arts and inventions which are owing to the secure possession of peace and liberty, unimprov'd by science, and destitute of the high pleasures of friendship, and all kinds of delightful social entertainment: (not to speak of a future state, the happiness of which (if there really be such a thing) must necessarily depend upon virtue;) nor is it possible for the mind of man, calmly and deliberately to judge otherwise; and of that future state we have constant premonitions in our own presaging thoughts, (so strong as most sensibly to affect the comfort of our present being,) without, at least, any possible security against it.

SERM.

III.

SERM. Now if these observations be true and just,  
 III. (and whether they are or not, let every man  
 upon calm reflexion judge for himself) let us  
 see what consequences may be fairly drawn  
 from them to our present purpose. In the  
 first place, here is an important part of the hu-  
 man constitution which can never be accounted  
 for upon *Atheistic* grounds, that is chance or  
 mechanism, the fortuitous rencounter of atoms,  
 or the necessary result of matter and motion.  
 Supposing an accidental concourse of atoms  
 moving in an infinite void, or an undirected  
 force impress'd on matter, could possibly pro-  
 duce corporeal systems and their various beau-  
 tiful forms which we see, (tho' even that has  
 been already prov'd to be sufficiently absurd,)  
 yet how shall this hypothesis solve the phæno-  
 mena of moral Entities? What strange col-  
 lision of atoms, or undirected impulse of mat-  
 ter, could produce beauty and deformity in  
 human characters and actions? Could any  
 combination of figures, or disposition and agi-  
 tation of material parts, strike out the ideas  
 of just and unjust, kind and unkind, sober  
 and vicious? Shall it be said that these are  
 mere fancies, the arbitrary figments of the  
 mind without any true and solid foundation in  
 nature? I answer, that indeed our ideas of  
 morality are not ideas of corporeal existence,  
 but



but it does not follow that therefore they are not real. Let any man try how he can satisfy himself concerning the reality of any object of his knowledge. If his organs are duly dispos'd, if he is conscious to himself that he has the free and undisturb'd exercise of his rational powers, if his perceptions be clear and distinct, and especially if they be constant and uniform, his ideas always the same, independently of his own choice, whenever he applies his mind to the review of them;--when it is so, there can be no doubt concerning the reality of such knowledge, unless we introduce an universal scepticism. Can any man in his senses make it a question whether his ideas of colours, and tastes and sounds, be real or fantastical? As little reason has he to doubt the reality of his ideas of *pure, and true, and just, and honest, and virtuous*. In the best state of his mind, when his understanding is clearest and freest from disturbance, whenever he thinks of moral differences, they appear always the same; nay, the more he considers them, the more plain and important they appear. Can we doubt whether a thing exists which causes in us pleasure or pain, whether we will or not? for example, whether the fire exists which warms or burns us? whether a sharp iron instrument exists, which piercing

SERM.  
III.



SERM. our flesh causes the sensation of acute pain? In

III. like manner, has any man reason to doubt whether there be a real difference between virtuous dispositions and works, which diffuse inward serenity and satisfaction through his mind, and vicious ones which necessarily fill him with horror and the most painful self-condemnation? We must, therefore, to account for this appearance, abandon the *Atheistic* scheme and all the forms of it, and have our recourse to an intelligent Cause, which has deeply interwoven into the human constitution a sense of things intirely independent on matter and all its properties and powers, as real however as any we perceive by our external senses; concerning which we can form propositions as true and certain, and draw consequences from them as clear as any which appear to our minds. For even the properties of lines and geometrical figures, and the incommensurability of some with others, is not more evident than the moral fitness and unfitness of some actions.

2dly, The importance of morality to the human life, and to its main ends, shews wisdom and design in giving men the sense and knowledge of it. Political constitutions are reasonably judg'd to be form'd with understanding, because of the ends which they answer.

swer. When laws are well fram'd for the pre-SERM.  
servation of public peace and order; the mea- III.  
sures of civil authority and subjection wisely  
settled; provision made for supporting the le-  
gal powers of the rulers, and liberties of the  
people; for securing them against foreign in-  
vasions and intestine broils, for deciding their  
debates about property in an equitable man-  
ner, for encouraging industry and other virtues,  
which tend to the benefit of the society, and  
restraining those irregularities which threaten  
its destruction;—when all this is apparent in  
the constitution of any community, no one  
will attribute it to a casual unconcerted en-  
counter of men, since there are so plain evi-  
dences of wisdom and design in the whole  
scheme. As little reason is there to imagine,  
that when a species of intelligent beings are  
sent into the world with sentiments of mora-  
lity, which are so evidently conducive to their  
happiness, tending to improve their nature,  
to ennoble the life of every one of them, fil-  
ling it with a variety of rational pleasure, and  
to render them eminently useful to one ano-  
ther, so that it is hardly to be conceiv'd to  
what a height of perfection and felicity they  
would be rais'd, if these moral sentiments were  
duly improv'd and had their full effect, and on  
the other hand how miserable the whole race  
would

SERM. would be, if intirely destitute of them ; it is

III. unreasonable, I say, to imagine that this  
should be without a directing Intelligence in  
the Cause of it.

Nothing can be more groundless and unsupported with any pretence of reason, than to alledge that the notions of morality, so common and prevailing in the world, were originally invented by politicians, and by their artifice impos'd upon credulous mankind, as the dictates of nature. For, (besides that strict virtue is often too little agreeable to the maxims and measures of their policy, to give it any appearance of proceeding from such an original;) every man who will look carefully into his own heart, may find there a standard of right and wrong, prior to any instructions, declarations and laws of men, whereby he pronounces judgment upon them. Nor was it ever known that any human invention, or any thing which was not the voice of reason and nature itself, appeared so uniform and unvaried, always consistent with itself, and always in the same light to the minds of men, as the principal moral species do. The forms of civil government differ according to the circumstances and inclinations of the people who create them: the external forms of religion too are variable ;

variable; and so is every thing of positive appointment and institution. But justice and mercy, gratitude and truth never alter; the

SERM.  
III.

learned and the unlearned, the most uninstructed and the most polite nations agree in their notions concerning them; and whenever they are intelligibly propos'd, approve them.

It is therefore evident, that morality is a part of the human constitution, and must be attributed to its author. Let this be understood in a sense agreeable to the nature of the thing. I do not mean that we are necessarily virtuous, as we are sensitive and intelligent; or that the practice of virtue is so essential, that no man can possibly be without it; (for the very notion of it imports free agency or choice;) but I mean, that the mind of man is so fram'd, as, when it attains the full exercise of its rational powers, to be necessarily sensible of moral obligations; and so far determin'd to satisfy them, that it cannot wilfully and designedly act a contrary part, without doing violence to itself; which is all the necessity that is consistent with the nature of such a being, and the nature of morality. If it be so, we may surely infer, that the cause of this constitution was intelligent. Since all the individuals of mankind are found to have a sense of virtue, and every  
one

SERM. one of them who reflects upon it must be conscious that it is engraven on his heart, prior to any intention of his own, or any instruction that he knows of, it must either have happened without any design at all, or it must have been design'd by the Author of our being. To say that moral agency, which is so universally the character of men, that without it no one can be reckon'd perfectly of the kind, and which is of so great importance, not only to the ornament and conveniency of life, but to all the highest purposes of our being, so far, that the want of it would make an essential difference in the species; to say that this is merely accidental, in other words, that there is no cause to be assign'd for it at all, is too gross an absurdity to require any confutation. If our minds can rest satisfied with that solution, there is an end of all rational enquiry; it may be said every thing came from nothing, and there is no cause to be sought of any perfection whatever. But if this be what we cannot possibly acquiesce in, (and indeed I will venture to say no man can, however he may force himself to a stupid inattention) there is nothing left to conclude, but that we were made moral agents by an intending intelligent Cause. I do not at present carry the argument so far as to infer from it the moral per-



perfections of the Deity, tho' it will very well SERM.  
bear even *that*; but he that will shut his eyes III.

against the evidence of understanding and design in the formation of the human nature, as we see it is form'd universally, with a sense of virtue and vice, good and evil, right and wrong in actions, and with a necessary approbation of the one and disapprobation of the other; I say, he that can shut his eyes against this evidence, is hardened beyond the power of reasonable conviction, and is no more fit to be argued with.

Thus I have endeavour'd, by a distinct consideration of the various works of God in the inanimate, the animal, the rational and moral world, to prove his Being, that is, (which was the point to be prov'd, and is directly the point in controversy between us and *Atheists*) that the formation of the universe and all its parts, is to be attributed to an active intelligent and designing Cause. But if this be so clear as we alledge, how comes it to pass that any of mankind should deny it; nay, that men, in whose writings there is a considerable appearance of reasoning and learning, profess'dly maintain the contrary principle? That men should be ignorant of God may be accounted for from their inattention; nor is it any presumption at all against the truth of his  
7 Being

SERM. Being and Attributes; since we know in a  
 III. multitude of instances, that the generality of  
 mankind are ignorant of the most certain  
 truths, tho' *this* is a matter of such common  
 concernment and so universally acknowledged  
 in the world, that scarcely any one is without  
 a loud call to attend to it. But if the evidence  
 be so strong as is pretended, it is surprizing  
 that men, otherwise sensible, and whose know-  
 ledge qualifies them to write in a tolerably con-  
 sistent manner, should avow a disbelief of this  
 grand article.

To remove this prejudice which may arise  
 in some minds from the profession of *Atbeism*  
 by learned men, let it be observed, *First*,  
 That other great absurdities, contrary to the  
 clearest evidence, even that of sense, have in  
 like manner been advanc'd by philosophers  
 themselves, whether from an affectation of  
 superior knowledge, enabling them to puzzle  
 the plainest truths and confound vulgar un-  
 derstandings, or from whatever other cause  
 it proceeded, the fact is certain, that the most  
 extravagant opinions have been vented with a  
 show of strong arguments to support them,  
 and demonstrations have been boasted of to  
 prove what all mankind by their eye-sight  
 knew to be false. It is very well known that  
*Zeno* and other philosophers have pretended to  
 prove

prove by demonstrative reasons that there is SERM.  
not, nor can be any such thing as motion. III.

*Secondly*, The nature of this subject is such, that our weak minds must necessarily be embarrassed in their conceptions of it: The necessary existence and absolute perfections of the supreme Being, which our reason obliges us to ascribe to him, are so far beyond our comprehension, that we cannot possibly form an adequate idea of them. How can we, seeing all things about us in the world circumscrib'd within certain bounds, conscious of limited existence, a limited power and understanding, and a short duration, comprehending infinity an eternity which must belong to the first Cause of all things? This incomprehensibleness, and these difficulties in conceiving what is so high above us, have been magnified by men, thro' the pride of their hearts, into strong objections against the truth, otherwise fully evident; and a fond conceit of their own abilities, which made them scorn to acknowledge any thing too hard for them, was the fatal snare which betray'd them into the most horrid impiety. Thus, by what they called *wisdom*, or by a false show of knowledge, *they know not God*, tho' he manifested himself clearly to them by his works. *Thirdly*, The opinions concerning the Deity, which some-

SERM. times prevail'd among those who profess'd to

III. believe it, were so absurd, that some were  
 tempted by them to doubt of, or deny it altogether. When the *glory of God was changed into the image of corruptible men, and of birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things*; and the Godhead was parcell'd out among a multitude of things, or rather inconsistent notions which had no manner of likeness to the true God; when the doctrine of *Theism* was thus misrepresented, it is not very much to be wondered at, that some should be led to reject it in the lump, who had not understanding, candor and patience enough to examine things narrowly, that they might distinguish between truth and falsehood. The transition from *Polytheism* to *Atheism*, and from a foolish, immoral and barbarous religion to none at all, was only a transition from one absurdity to another.

But in the last place, above all, the viciousness of mens tempers and the wickedness of their lives, which they were unwilling to part with, was the prevailing snare whereby they were led into this greatest of all errors. They must have been very unattentive to what may be commonly observ'd in the world, and indeed to the constitution of the human mind, who do not know that it is often bias'd by  
 its

its affections, and misled in its judgment of things by interest and passion. Men are difficultly persuaded to embrace disagreeable opinions, and too easily induc'd to believe what they wish to be true. The slenderest appearances of reason on the side of inclination, pass for strong arguments, and insuperable difficulties against *it* are neglected as trifling objections. Now, as the idea of God always takes in authority over men, his inspection into their affairs and their accountableness to him, and is therefore accompanied with a suspicion at least, that the crimes with which their consciences charge them, will meet with his disapprobation, and a punishment from him, of which they know no measure nor end; 'tis this which fills them with a dread of his Being; and because they are obstinately unwilling to reconcile themselves to the thoughts of it, and make it sit easy on their minds by a resolution of forsaking their vicious courses, they are led at last to an utter denial of it, that so they may get rid of those uneasy apprehensions which arise in them from the consideration of his moral character.

But the generality of bad men treat the principles of religion with neglect; they don't carry their opposition to them so far as to form any thing like a consistent scheme



SERM. of *Atheism*, in which their minds may rest

III. satisfied as truth, but rather endeavour to bury them in forgetfulness, applying their thoughts to other affairs and amusements in which they take greater pleasure. They greedily entertain a bold jest or a sally of wit which tends to countenance their vices. But the main support of them is stupid inconsideration, which has all the effects of infidelity, with regard to any influence on their practice; for principles not at all attended to, can no more excite the affections and regulate our conduct, than if they were not believ'd. Nor is inconsideration less criminal; for the guilt of wrong opinions arising wholly from negligence, prejudices and bad dispositions, where-ever these are equally prevalent, they are equally faulty, whether they produce errors in judgment or not.

It may be alledg'd on the other hand, that virtuous minds are prejudic'd in favour of *Theism*. As morality appears to them most amiable, they are apt to imagine, perhaps without sufficient evidence, such a constitution of things in the universe as is favourable to it: to intitle it to a perfect understanding of which they think it is worthy, and put it under the protection of irresistible power. I acknowledge this is so far true, that I believe

lieve it is hardly possible for a sincere lover of virtue, not to have his affections engag'd to the Deity; not to wish his Being earnestly, if it should appear at all doubtful, or that any suspicion lies against it; and not to rejoice in it when he is fully persuaded that it is true. Let an *Atheist* call this prejudice if he will, I should never be ashamed of it. A principle which has a necessary connexion with virtue, is its chief support, and without which it cannot prevail in the world; such a principle is not dangerous if it can possibly be a mistake, tho' its excellent tendency, I may say absolute necessity to the happiness of mankind, is a strong presumption of its truth. But if this be the prepossession of virtuous minds, the contrary temper disposes to a contrary opinion. Let these two be set against each other, that we may judge which is the most becoming human nature, and has the greatest probability of leading us to a right judgment. I believe at last the cause of religion and virtue must stand or fall together, and the hearty friends of the latter cannot be enemies to the other.

SERM.

III.

But still it may seem strange that this great fundamental article should be liable to any controversy; that since it is of so great importance to the duty and happiness of intelli-

SERM. gent creatures to acknowledge the supreme

III. Being, the evidence of his existence and his attributes is not so strong as to exclude all possibility of doubt. If this be meant as an objection against, or ground of suspicion concerning the truth of that grand article, the Being of God, it has no colour of argument to that purpose. For the only principle it can rest upon is this, that Nothing is to be certainly believ'd, which can at all be contradicted: and if that be allow'd, our knowledge will lie within a very narrow compass. Except our own being, and some few axioms of very little use, without such applications of them, and consequences from them, as may be involv'd in dispute, almost nothing will pass for certain. The existence of matter, the possibility of motion, and even geometrical truths have been argu'd against and deny'd; nay, perhaps there is scarcely any proposition capable of proof, but what is capable of being contradicted, thro' the weakness, inattention, or prejudices of men. If the pretence that the evidence of the divine Being and Attributes is not so satisfying as might be expected, at least not so necessitating as to exclude all possibility of doubt; if, I say, the pretence be carried no farther than as an alledged instance of defectiveness

ness in the human constitution, and therefore SERM.  
difficultly reconcil'd to the wisdom and good- III. 2  
ness of its Author; the consideration of it in  
that view, does not belong to this place;  
where we are only insisting on the evidence  
of the principle itself. And yet, not to pass  
it by altogether unregarded, I observe that the  
true meaning of the objection really amounts  
to no more than this, that it is hardly con-  
sistent with the wisdom and goodness of God  
to make rational creatures so imperfect as we  
are, or wanting a certain perfection which we  
imagine would have been very proper for  
them; particularly without an intuitive know-  
ledge of His existence, such as they have of  
their own being. Now how is it possible for  
any man to prove that such a constitution was  
wrong; that in a world which contains so  
great a variety of creatures with so many dif-  
ferent kinds and degrees of perfection, Wis-  
dom and Goodness did not allow that there  
should be an order of intelligent beings, who  
should not indeed have the knowledge of their  
Maker, (upon which their duty and their  
greatest happiness depends,) forced upon them,  
so that they could not possibly resist it, yet  
with sufficient evidence of the truth, and fa-  
culties enabling them to discern it; at the  
same time under obligations, which must ap-

SERM. pear if they reflect on their own constitution,  
 III. to use their faculties for that purpose?

How wisdom and goodness may require that Atheists should be dealt with, is quite another question. What unhappiness they may bring upon themselves by their own perverseness, leading them into their fatal error, or what allowances are to be made for particular infelicities in the condition of any, which may give some occasion to it, God knows best, and the Judge of the whole world will surely do right. But for us, our proper business is, without murmuring at any appointed imperfections in our make, to improve all the advantages of it in the best manner we can, that we may attain to the affectionate practical knowledge of our Creator, and thereby to all that perfection and happiness to which it tends to raise our nature. And to conclude with a particular application of the argument I have been insisting on. Since we have so full proof of ruling intelligence in the formation and government of the world, since all the works of nature proclaim it, and especially our own constitution, (for who but the author of our being *batb put wisdom in the inward parts, and given understanding to the heart* \*?) this is the character of the Deity which claims our highest veneration. It is a very elegant de-

\* Job xxxviii. 36.

scription



scription which *Job* \* gives us of the excellence of wisdom, and which every attentive mind must assent to, *Man knoweth not the price thereof, it cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for it. It cannot be valued with gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the saphir. The gold and the chrystal cannot equal it, and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of pearl, for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it. But where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding? The depth, and the sea, and destruction, and death, say it is not in them. The effects of it are scatter'd over all the works of nature, and the whole œconomy of providence, in a beautiful variety; and the lively image of it is stamp'd on rational creatures, whom God has taught what is their true wisdom namely, to fear him, and to depart from evil, and to whom he has communicated such an understanding as we cannot but account the high distinguishing privilege of their nature. But how much more to be admir'd, and worthy of our most peculiar veneration and esteem, is the eternal fountain of intellectual light, who is himself only perfect in knowledge,*

\* Chap. xxviii.

## S E R M O N IV.

The Spirituality of the Divine Nature  
explain'd and asserted.

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John iv. 24.

*God is a Spirit.*

SERM.  
IV.

I HAVE endeavour'd in the foregoing discourses to prove that first fundamental principle of religion, the existence of the Deity, or of an active intelligent Being, who is the original Cause of all the great appearances in the corporeal system of the universe, and of those self-moving, sensitive, and intellectual powers, with which many particular beings are endu'd. But intending to establish this great truth on such a foundation as should comprehend all believers in God, however otherwise differing in their opinions, at the same time the most evident, and the least liable to difficulties, I abstracted from the consideration of those properties, perfections or attributes, which belong to the Divine nature, not insisting even on its spirituality. Nevertheless,

theless, it will set the whole subject still in a SERM.  
clearer light, and add great force to the ar- IV.

arguments which have been already adduc'd, if we can advance one step farther, and prove that the supreme active and intelligent Cause of all things, is spiritual, or immaterial. And this I shall endeavour to do in the following method; *First*, I will shew, from the frame and appearances of the material world itself, that there is such a thing as spirit, essentially different from matter. *Secondly*, That the beings which are endued with life, sense and understanding, in a limited degree of perfection, are spiritual; from whence it will evidently follow, that the original Cause is himself a pure Spirit.

*First*, To shew from the frame and appearances of the material world itself, that there is such a thing as spirit, essentially different from matter. This alone is sufficient to overthrow the fundamental grounds of *Atheism*: For however different its forms be, they all agree in excluding spirit from any share in the origin and constitution of things, and in the effects we see produc'd; ascribing them all, even sense and self-motion which we perceive in animals, nay, and understanding which we are conscious of in ourselves,—ascribing all I say, to senseless matter and its casual or necessary

SERM. fary motion. The admission of spirit would

IV. ruin the *Atheistic* scheme: for spirit is suppos'd to be essentially distinct from body, being by its nature active and intelligent; and if that be once allow'd to have an existence separate from, and independent on matter, by what pretence of reason shall counsel and design be excluded out of the formation and government of the world, or any part of it? Nay, where can a barrier be fixed against infinite perfection, or the Deity? Now that spirit must be admitted, will appear from this consideration; that attending carefully to the obvious common properties of matter, we shall find it impossible, without having recourse to the agency of spirit, to account for the motion, the changes of the situation, and of the magnitude, figure and other qualities of corporeal beings, it is the necessary condition of all bodies, the very law of their nature, to continue in the state wherein they are, and to resist any alteration, until it be effected, and the resistance conquered, by an external force. If this necessarily belongs to all matter, its smallest and its greatest quantities, how shall the beginning of motion and the most common appearances in material nature itself, such as the changes of its form which depend upon motion, be explained without an external agent? Those

Those who have studied the powers of mat-  
ter with the greatest exactness, find that there  
is establish'd among all the bodies a law of  
mutual attraction and gravitation; and by the  
help of this one observation, attending to it  
closely and pursuing it through all its con-  
sequences, they have made the greatest im-  
provements in natural philosophy, and given  
the most satisfying explication which has yet  
appear'd, of the constant motions and other  
great phænomena in the visible heavens and  
the earth. But they do not pretend to tell us the  
cause of attraction and gravitation, whereby all  
bodies tend towards each other, with a force  
greater or lesser according to their distances:  
Only 'tis certain, this active moving force is  
not in bodies themselves. For all which can be  
call'd their action on each other, or their im-  
pulse, is by the contact of their surfaces;  
whereas the force of gravity operates at a di-  
stance, and is always in proportion to the solid  
content of the gravitating and attracting bodies;  
and therefore the immediate Cause must be  
something which pervades the intire mass of  
them, even to their very centers, and makes  
an impression upon every particle. In vain  
should we fly for a satisfying solution of this  
appearance, to a subtle fluid matter, which  
penetrating solid bodies and filling their in-  
terstices,

SERM.

IV.



SERM. terstices, impels them towards each other. For

IV. besides that this is but an arbitrary supposition, it ought to be considered that subtle matter is matter still, passive and undesigning, not acting but acted upon. The difficulty will remain, and the question, as chang'd by this hypothesis, be as hard to answer as the question concerning the cause of gravitation without it. What is it that determines and gives a force to the (essentially unactive) subtle matter of the sun, and the subtle matter of the earth, whereby they impel those bodies towards each other with a force proportionable to the quantity of solid extended substance they contain, when other bodies which contain a lesser quantity of the like extended solid substance, but are as open to the impressions of the undistinguishing subtle matter, do not so gravitate? In short, if we should heap material causes upon material causes to infinity, we shall never be satisfied in that way: there must be a beginning of operation from an active principle, which we call spirit, essentially distinct from matter. The ideas of it and its properties, namely, activity and consciousness, are as different from extension, solidity, divisibility and figure, which belong to all bodies, as any ideas in our minds can possibly be. The more we consider, the more we shall be convinc'd that

*explain'd and asserted.*


III

matter of itself, and without spirit, can produce nothing even in itself, none of its own appearances, neither motion, gravity nor form; it is capable of being variously compounded and divided; it is capable of various figures and situations; but it can neither compound nor divide itself, neither change its figure nor situation.

SERM.  
IV.

If it be so, we must conclude there is such a thing in the world as spirit, essentially different from, but intimately present with all bodies which we see, and continually operating upon them for it; is the efficient cause of their most common and constant appearances. Mechanism itself cannot be without spirit, for the mechanical powers of matter, commonly so called, depend upon it, since gravity is owing to its influence. It is true all this does not directly prove understanding in the cause of motion, gravity, and other common appearances in the material world; but it proves activity essentially different from matter, which forms it and produces the most important effects that appear in it. And this is sufficient to overturn the grounds of *Albeism*, showing that matter is not the sole being or substance in the universe, and the sole origin and cause of all things. Besides, as we find by experience in ourselves, and other agents

SERM. terstices, impels them towards each other. For

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SERM. agents as far as we know, activity is still ac-

IV. companied with thought and perception.

There can be no rational pretence for denying understanding to the great active forming principle of the corporeal system, without which, matter, if it could possibly have existed, must have remain'd an eternal chaos devoid of motion, and consequently of various figure, or any kind of regular appearance. What limits can be set to the intellectual perfection of that mighty Agent, who is independent of the material world, on whom it necessarily depends, prior in nature : For he is the author of its form, and has moulded its parts into their different shapes, with all the diversity of their different qualities, and given it those laws by which it is still govern'd? Rather indeed what we call its laws, are his own continued uniform and regular operations. And tho', as I observ'd before, some who believ'd a Deity, weakly imagin'd him to be corporeal, not conceiving any substance distinct from matter ; this was only an inconsistency in their notions which proceeded from not attending to the irreconcilable difference between the ideas of material qualities and intelligence. If they had fully considered their own acknowledg'd principle of an eternal, all-wise and powerful mind, comparing  
with



with it the essential and most obvious proper-  
ties of all matter, this would have corrected  
their error. But the case is very different of  
those who therefore exclude spirit, because  
they exclude original contrivance and agency;  
who not only profess, but their scheme ne-  
cessarily requires them to do so, as the chief  
security of their grand principle against the ex-  
istence of God, that there is no being in the  
universe but matter, from the modifications  
whereof all appearances arise, even intelli-  
gence itself. Which scheme is effectually re-  
futed, if it be prov'd that the simplest and  
most common qualities of matter upon which  
its appearances depend, must be attributed to  
the energy of an active immaterial principle.

*Secondly,* The beings which are endu'd with  
life, sense and understanding, in a limited  
degree of perfection, are spiritual; that is, the  
vital, sensitive and intelligent principles in  
them are spiritual. Indeed it would seem  
impossible in the nature of things, that mat-  
ter should by any modification, that is, any  
motion and change of the figure and order of  
its parts, be exalted even into animal sensation,  
much less into pure intellection abstracted  
from any sensible quality. The reasoning of  
some ancient writers is very strong to prove  
that the percipient of material objects and their

SERM. sensible qualities cannot be itself material.

IV. For if it were, the perceptive faculty must either  
be lodg'd in one single indivisible point; or  
in every point of the extended substance; or  
else every part must receive only a several part  
of the image or impression, and the percep-  
tion be the result of the whole compar'd and  
united together. The first of these suppo-  
sitions is an evident absurdity, there being no  
such thing as an indivisible point or particle of  
matter; and if there were, how can it be con-  
ceiv'd that a single atom in every animal  
should be only sensitive, the rest wholly inca-  
pable of that privilege; that it should alike re-  
ceive the impression of all magnitudes; and that  
it should be invariably permanent through the  
whole life, when the other particles of matter  
which enter into the constitution are in a per-  
petual flux. That the whole perceptive power  
or the entire sensation, is not in every part of  
the supposed material soul, is as manifest; for  
upon that supposition, an animal would be,  
not a single percipient, but a collection of  
them; and the perception itself must be vari-  
ous, compounded of many; contrary to what  
we know it is by our own consciousness of its  
perfect simplicity. And *Lastly*, to say that  
every part of the perceiving extended sub-  
stance, receives a several part of the image or  
impression

impression of the external object, will no way SERM.  
account for perception; because perception IV.

being single, it must, on that supposition, be the result of the whole united; and in order to that union, the parts must be brought to an indivisible point, properly the percipient, which has been already shewn to be absurd. If this reasoning be thought not obvious enough, (I have however set it in the clearest light I could,) yet it will naturally appear to any attentive person, very unreasonable to think, if not altogether unconceivable, that a body put into any form, (being really no more than an aggregate of parts void of life and sense,) should by any possible disposition of its parts, be rais'd to a capacity of animal sensation, the idea of which has not the least affinity with divisibility, magnitude, figure or any quality of matter. If it be so, we must conclude that there are beings in the world essentially different from matter. But the argument for the immateriality of the human soul will appear still stronger, if we consider the exercise of its purely intellectual powers. We have the ideas of matter by our senses, representing to our minds its sensible qualities, from which we infer its particular kind of existence, as the occasion, or somewhat which has the power of exciting those ideas. But

SERM. attending to the exercises of our own minds,

IV. and reflecting on them, we have ideas of an intirely different kind, which do not take in any of the properties of matter, such as solidity, divisibility and figure, nor its secondary qualities, as hardness, colour and the like, nor the idea of motion. Of this sort are perception, consciousness, the affections of the mind, its desires and volitions or self-determinations, and the more complex qualities of gratitude, justice, generosity, mercy, and other virtues; the subject of these we call spirit. Now these two kinds of ideas are as different as any can possibly be, without any mutual relation or agreement at all; and if we may not from thence infer a real difference between the subjects of the properties which are represented by such essentially distinct ideas, there can be no certainty of human knowledge.

If these two points be settled upon clear evidence, that the active principle which form'd and governs the corporeal world is a spirit, and that the animating principles of the sensitive and rational life are spirits, we must infer that God also is a Spirit. For either he himself is the immediate forming and directing Cause of the corporeal system and its appearances; or the active principle, which is the immediate Cause, is deriv'd from him; and

and all the intelligent agents in the universe, not absolutely perfect nor eternal and unorigi-  
nated, (of which there is a numberless variety,) being spirits, cannot be the accidental or necessary result of certain dispositions in the parts of matter, but must proceed from an original intelligent and powerful Spirit: For that no perfection can belong to the effect which does not, in the same, or a more eminent degree belong to the Cause. But even upon supposition that the argument were not conclusive with respect to sensitive and inferior rational beings, and that it were not impossible for a particular system of matter to be endu'd with all the faculties of the human soul, yet still it holds concerning the supreme original Cause of all things. For that supposed possibility, (which some learned men allow, at the same time firmly believing that the Deity is, and necessarily must be immaterial,) means no more than that we are so ignorant of the essences and properties of things, as not to be sure of an utter inconsistency, in supposing that Omnipotence may endue a part of matter with the capacity of thought: But that matter merely of itself, and without the agency of a superior power, has not that capacity, and consequently, that original intelligence cannot be corporeal, is sufficiently evident.



SERM. Let us now more particularly consider this  
IV. perfection of the Deity, which in our Saviour's judgment is a most necessary point of belief; for he taught it to a very ignorant person, and lays it as the foundation of the most perfect and acceptable worship thus describ'd, *worship in spirit and truth*. 'Tis principally with this view we should apply our minds to the consideration of the Divine Attributes. All men who believe the Being of God, agree in acknowledging he is to be worshipped. Nature teaches us benevolence to an intelligent Being, reverence and submission to a superior, and gratitude to a benefactor. But if there is a God, he is the most perfect Intelligence, the supreme Lord, as being the independent Cause of things, and to him we owe our existence, all our powers, and all our happiness. Therefore to him our best affections are unquestionably due, with the most proper and reasonable expressions of them. Besides, his unlimited dominion over us makes it our highest interest to please him as far as possibly we can, and obtain his approbation. These considerations show that nothing can concern us more than to understand the true character of the Supreme Being. Their ignorance of him involv'd multitudes of mankind in superstition, which was reproachful

to their rational nature, and in consequence of SERM.  
that, in most scandalous and destructive vices. IV.

*Becoming vain in their imaginations concerning the divine perfections, their foolish hearts were darkened, and they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into images made like corruptible things; in pursuance of which they were abandon'd to vile affections, to a reprobate mind\*, and to unnatural wickedness.* It is true, that errors concerning the moral attributes of God, have the most immediate ill influence on the tempers and manners of men, because he being first suppos'd to be an object of the highest esteem and veneration, we shall naturally incline to imitate the dispositions and qualities which we ascribe to him, and account it our glory to do so. For which reason, when the heathens imagin'd their gods were corrupt, passionate, revengeful and lascivious, it was to be expected that the worshippers should also, after their example, be corrupt, indulging themselves without restraint, in the same passions and the same sensual gratifications. But the natural perfections of the Deity are of a different consideration; for they are not the patterns which we pretend, or are supposed to imitate. It never enter'd into any man's mind that he must be

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eternal,

\* Rom. i. 21, 23, 24.

SERM. eternal, immense and unchangeable like God,

IV.

or such a spirit as he is. Yet the natural perfections tend to raise in our minds a high admiration of God; and besides, are consider'd as the foundation of the moral attributes, in the eminent degree wherein he is possess'd of them. So that erroneous opinions concerning the *one*, lead to pernicious mistakes about the *other*, and therefore it is necessary for us to inquire, as far as our faculties will enable us, into those divine perfections which are commonly called natural, by way of distinction from the moral, and to settle our notions concerning them. We cannot indeed by searching find out God, nor understand the Almighty to perfection: His essence is not to be comprehended by the human understanding, nor any of his attributes. When we call him a spirit, 'tis but a very obscure and inadequate idea we express by that word. The truth is, tho' we know there is a real difference between body and spirit, and this distinction is generally thought, (I will not affirm it to be exactly true,) to comprehend all kinds of beings in the universe, the subjects of the properties, qualities and modes of which we have any notion, or as they are commonly called, substances, yet, we do not understand the intimate essence of either. But the deno-

denomination of spirit is justly attributed to SERM.  
God, and gives us a true, tho' imperfect idea IV.

of his nature, as comprehending consciousness, intelligence, liberty and affections, the foundation and capacity of moral perfection and happiness, which are the chief excellencies of inferior spirits above all material beings, and must eminently belong to the Father of Spirits.

That we may proceed further, and avoid mistakes in forming our notions of this subject, let it be observ'd, that as in the corporeal system we see a vast variety of forms, and in respect of various and important use, regularity, magnificence, and other qualities which strike the imagination, there are some bodies which appear much more excellent than others; so we cannot doubt but there may be, indeed that there are, many different kinds of beings comprehended under the general denomination of spirit. One low kind which we know best, are our own souls; which in the exercise of their faculties have at present, a great dependence on our bodies and their organs. But there is no reason at all to imagine, that the same is the condition of all spirits, and in every state. For as we perceive an essential difference between body and spirit, between the ideas of which and their properties there is no connexion,

SERM. nexion, the mutual dependence of them

IV. which we find in ourselves, cannot be reasonably thought to arise from the nature of spirit ; but the union of soul and body so as to make one man (the nature of which union we do not understand, only discern that the compounding parts have a mutual dependence and influence on each other) this, I say, is rather to be attributed to the free constitution and appointment of our Creator. There is no reason then why we should not conclude that our souls may, and that they shall subsist in a separate state, and exert their powers more perfectly than they do now. And there is no reason why we should not believe that there may be, and that there are other kinds of spirits, which have not, nor ever had a dependence, in their being, perfections and operations, on matter or any bodily organs. These appear to be the most excellent kind of spirits, which are the most independent on bodies, as being more unconfin'd in their manner of perceiving external objects, and their activity not limited to a narrow sphere ; besides being free from many other inconveniencies which our own experience teaches us that such a condition as ours is liable to. But the supreme Spirit is alone absolutely perfect and independent, having the



the intire system of matter under his direction to form and dispose of it at his pleasure, not subject to such impressions from it, nor tied down to such a manner of acting upon it, as inferior spirits are, by the limited condition of their nature, and by the constitution which he has appointed for them.

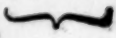
The notion of some ancient philosophers, particularly the Stoics, that God is the soul of the world, was mean and unworthy of his high perfections. Tho' it imply'd an acknowledgment of the Divine Presence in all parts of the universe, every where intelligent and governing the whole, and represented all, even the most different and the most distant parts of the world, as united together in one system, under the care and direction of one sympathizing intelligent nature, which continually promotes the greatest absolute good of the whole, (which was a noble sentiment much insisted on by some of those learned men, and improv'd by them to excellent practical purposes;) yet that the Deity animates the *Mundane* system in the same manner that the human soul animates the human body, is too low a way of thinking concerning the supreme Being. For besides that it naturally leads one to imagine an independence of the world in its being, on the eternal spirit, (as the human mind

SERM. mind does not make its own body, nor has a

IV. power over its existence,) which probably was the erroneous opinion of some of the ancients, and tends to limit the Divine absolute perfections and Presence to created nature; it carries in it such an idea of his subjection to impressions, and even uneasinesses arising from the disorders of the world, as is inconsistent with the infinite immutable excellence and happiness of his independent Being. The notion of an eminent modern philosopher is much more just and reasonable, who, as the result of his most curious and excellent observations on the Divine counsel and power manifested in the system of the universe, says, that the Deity imports the dominion of a spiritual Being over the world, not as his own body but as his servants, intirely subject to his government \*.

This leads us to consider the peculiar and transcendent excellence of God as a Spirit. Tho' some inferior beings have the same denomination, and are truly of a spiritual nature, yet he is of an intirely different, and infinitely more perfect kind. There may be, for aught we know, as great a diversity in the spiritual, as in the material world; as many different species of spirits, that is, of beings which have no bodily substance, as there are

\* *Sir Isaac Newton, Schol. Gener.*

of visible forms ; and some of them as much SERM.  
inferior to, as well as distinct from others, as IV.  
the lower kinds of life, perception and acti- 

— vity, are from dead and senseless matter itself. We must not therefore imagine, that we have form'd an adequate idea of God's nature, when we have prov'd him to be a spirit, and conceive of him as such ; meaning by that name a living, intellectual and active being, essentially distinguish'd from corporeal substance. For tho' that is truly affirm'd of him in common with other spirits, yet he excels all other, even intellectual natures, more than our souls do the lowest inanimate beings.

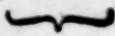
There are two principal properties of spirit, intelligence and activity, which as I have shewn, must be attributed to the Deity ; but they belong to him in an infinitely higher degree, and are exercis'd by him in a more perfect manner than by any dependent being. Tho' the common use of all languages ascribes to God the perceptions we are conscious of in ourselves, as seeing and hearing and remembrance ; nay, and the organs of sensation, such as eyes and ears ; yet scarcely are there any so ignorant as to understand these forms of speaking in a literal sense, but every one means by them the Divine most exact knowledge and discernment of things, to which our low and imperfect

SERM. imperfect manner of perceiving by corporeal

IV. organs, bears some analogy. He that *made the eye* of man, to convey to him such a representation and knowledge of external objects as is not compleat and thoroughly comprehensive of their nature, but accommodated to the purposes of our present state, and proportionate to the other imperfect faculties of the human mind; *he*, the Maker, *sees*, not in a strict and proper sense as we do, but understands all things in a more eminent and perfect manner. He that *made the ear*, the instrument by which are convey'd to us, the sentiments and desires of our fellow-creatures moving our affections; *he*, in a superior and more perfect way, knows and understands the sentiments and desires of all intelligent beings, whether conceiv'd only in the mind or express'd by the mouth. In like manner as the human strength and power of operation are exerted by the means of arms and hands, these bodily organs are figuratively attributed to God to denote his Almighty power; tho' it is exercised by him in a quite different manner, which we cannot comprehend, but we are sure it is not like tedious and laborious human operation.

In a special manner it is to be observ'd, that many of the springs of action in embodied spirits, setting their powers at work, and which

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we are conscious of in ourselves, tho' they are S E R M.  
analogically attributed to the infinite eternal IV.  
Mind, yet do not properly belong to him. 

The wise Author of our constitution has seen fit to mix in it, with superior faculties, some lower appetites and passions, which powerfully excite us to pursue the ends of our nature in the present imperfect state. Our minds are furnish'd with determinations which tend to the preservation of the body, and to the comfort and happiness of the animal life: We have desires and affections which rise no higher in their design; and we have passions which are excited by, and accompanied with certain motions in the body. But the divine purely spiritual nature is infinitely above these infirmities. Some of the heathens were so gross as to think the gods capable of sensual desires, and pleasure in the gratification of them; and perhaps there are others who imagine something like human passions in the Deity, particularly the passions of pity, hatred, anger and grief. Indeed the Scripture itself speaks of God's hating the wicked, of his bowels of compassion mov'd for distressed creatures, and of his anger and grief. But these expressions are only us'd in the same figurative manner of speaking as when the bodily organs of sense and motion are ascrib'd to him, and we should



SERM. be far from thinking there are any such emo-

IV. tions in his most blessed and perfect mind, as  
 we feel in ourselves arising from things surprising or disagreeable to us. A little reflection would convince us that such passions show the imperfection of our state, and a mixture of unhappiness in it; and therefore they cannot possibly affect the infinite self-sufficiency, the undisturb'd rest and the perfect felicity of the supreme independent Being, When therefore he is spoken of as having indignation, compassion, anger or grief, it is only to be understood as an analogical representation of his conduct as governor of the world towards his creatures. What men would do when they are compassionate, angry or grieved, that God does, or produces a similar effect, with unerring wisdom, perfect tranquillity and goodness, without the weakness of pity, the sensation of sorrow, or perturbation of wrath.

Again, an unchangeable life or absolute immortality is a property belonging to the Divine nature as it is spiritual. Our spirits are subject to pains and changes in their condition, from the body and otherwise; other spirits of a higher order may be so too in various degrees; but the most perfect Spirit is infinitely above the reach of sufferings, and infinitely

nitely remote from all possibility of change. Such is the absolute simplicity of his Being, free from any mixture or composition, there are no seeds or principles of decay *within* him, nor can he suffer from any thing *without*. We find by experience, that our compounded natures, made up of different parts, are liable to dissolution; it is the more simple spiritual part of our constitution that shall outlive the present state, and being dislodg'd of the earthly tabernacle, shall subsist separately. But there is a great difference between our immortality and God's: Ours, as we were *created for his good pleasure*, continually depends upon it, and may cease if he pleases; but it is impossible he should not be the *living* God, the same immutable Spirit, *yesterday, and to day and for ever*.

I shall only add, as the foundation of the improvement I propose to make of this subject, and which the text leads us to, namely, the regulating of our worship; That the Deity is not resembled by any sensible forms; His nature and attributes are alike essentially different from all the properties and qualities of matter, and no one part of it makes any nearer approaches to him than another. He is not to be touched or handled, and *no man hath seen him at any time, nor can see him*. The most subtle æther, or the purest light, is no

SERM. image of his spiritual substance ; and the hu-

IV. man shape is no more a true representation of

God than the shape of any other animal, nay, than a clod of earth or any other inanimate thing. It was therefore wisely provided by the Lawgiver of the *Jews*, (whose principal care seems to have been the preserving of their worship from idolatry) that no image should be made of the Godhead ; and he gives the reason for it, that in all the miraculous appearances and extraordinary manifestations God had ever vouchsafed to them, (and they were very many) they had never seen any *similitude* ; there was never any handle given them for so absurd and gross a conceit, as that the Deity is like any visible being in the whole world. We read often of God's discovering his glory to them, as at the giving of the law, by a prodigious tempest, thunder and fire ; and in their march through the wilderness, by a cloud in the day, and a pillar of fire in the night, which were called the tokens of his *presence* ; tho' really he is alike present in all places. Such astonishing things were apt to strike the minds even of very stupid people with a sense of his interposition in their behalf ; and that his care and power were employ'd for them. But still there was no determinate shape, no figure of any abiding sensible object,

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imitable by human art, whereby they should have the least countenance or occasion given them, to make an image of their God, or *change his glory into the likeness of any creature.* It is true, we read sometimes in the Old Testament of divine appearances in a human form. Thus God is said to have *spoken to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend*; and of the three angels which appeared to *Abraham* in the likeness of men, before the destruction of *Sodom*, one was distinguish'd by the peculiar veneration of that eminent saint, as of a superior character. But this seems to be rightly understood by interpreters concerning the *Messias*, that divine Person who was in the *form of God*, before his incarnation. Several passages of the Old Testament and the New compar'd together, plainly intimate that he was with the *Israelites*, conducting them as the divine *Presence*, and the *Angel of the covenant*, in whom the name of God was. *St. Stephen*, in the 7th of the *Acts*, speaking of God's appearing to *Moses* in the burning bush, and saying with an audible voice, *I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*; *St. Stephen*, I say, expressly attributes this to the person whom he calls the *Angel of the Lord*, and who was with *Moses* in the church in the wilderness. And the Apostle

SERM. *Paul*\* mentioning the sins and punishments of

IV. the *Israelites* in the wilderness, for an admonition to us on whom the ends of the world are come, clearly insinuates that *Christ* was present with them directing their affairs; for he says†, *neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.* Thus as our Lord *Jesus Christ*, the image of the invisible God, in the fulness of time, assum'd the human nature, the word was made flesh and dwelt with us as in a tabernacle, manifesting the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Before his incarnation he acted with full power, representing his Father in his transactions with men; by him God made the world, and by him govern'd the church: But the Divine nature itself, the essence of the supreme Being is invisible; to whom is God like, or whereunto can he be resembled?

I shall in the next place, consider the practical purpose to which our Saviour has gone before us, in applying this important doctrine of natural religion asserted in the text, namely, the regulating our worship. First of all we may see the absurdity of that practice which great multitudes of mankind have run into, the forming corporeal images of the Deity as mediums of worship. The worshipping of false gods, that is beings, whether

\* 1 Cor. x. † v. 9.



real or imaginary, to which Divinity is falsely attributed, is an error against other religious principles, either against the existence of the true God, or his unity: But this species of idolatry, so early introduc'd into the world, and which so generally prevail'd in it for many ages, is a most direct and heinous indignity to the spiritual Divine nature. The unreasonableness of it, one would think, might easily appear to men if they did but seriously reflect on themselves. For how just and evidently conclusive is *St. Paul's* argument to the *Athenians*? Acts xvii. 29. *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God*;—we intelligent creatures, conscious of intellectual and self-determining powers, and of noble affections which do not terminate on sensible objects, but on spiritual and moral excellence;—*we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art or man's device.* What man is so far lost to a just sense of the dignity of his nature, as not to know that the vital principle within him of thought, of choice, of sublime desire, of rational and moral pleasure, is far more noble than a whole world of corporeal inanimate beings? And should we then so affront the Father of our spirits, from whom all their excellence is deriv'd, himself the original and purest Spirit,

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SERM. as to imagine he is like any material and cor-

IV. ruptible thing?

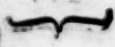
Superstition grew by degrees in the world, to such a height of stupidity and barbarity, as was reproachful to the intelligent human nature; but the beginnings of it were more refin'd and plausible. The first idols probably were the sun, moon and stars, not as the ultimate objects of worship, but as the suppos'd habitations of the Deity, the visible instruments and magnificent representations of his power and goodness: But afterwards those creatures themselves were *honour'd besides the Creator*, and were admitted to a participation of the respect due to him. For such is the weakness of mens minds, and if they do not carefully watch against it, their attention is so easily engross'd by the objects of sense continually before them, and which they find useful, that they forget things of vastly greater excellence and moment, which require careful reflection to preserve a lively sense of them. They proceeded next to the deifying of departed Heroes, imagining that their virtues were rewarded with an exaltation to a high dignity in the other world, and that they were even taken into a share of the divine administration, still having an affectionate remembrance of their friends and their country, to  
which

which they had been useful upon earth. As these men supposed to be advanc'd to God-head, were of mixt characters, the idea of the Divine moral purity and perfection began to be alter'd, and vices had their patrons among the Gods, till at length ignorance and corruption still increasing, some of them were worshipped with the most obscene and inhuman rites. Even brute animals of several kinds, and vegetables too became idols; and in fine, whatever recommended itself to the affections of men by its usefulness, and whatever was dreaded by them because it might be hurtful, was worshipped. Thus we see that the tendency of departing from the simplicity of a reasonable service, is to the most absurd opinions and practices, as opposite to real religion as *Atheism* itself is: In this respect worse, because they destroy humanity, and under the pretence of devotion, give a sanction to those crimes which nature itself, abstracting from any consideration of God, would abhor. Every kind of idolatry, even the most refin'd, and for which the best excuses are made, (such as, that worship is not intended to terminate on the inferior beings, sensible objects or others, before which it is offered, but that they are only us'd as helps to devotion, preserving still a higher regard for God, who is the ultimate

SERM. object of adoration;) every kind of idolatry,

IV. I say, is founded in falshood, as the natural  
 { progress of it is to the utter subversion of all  
 true piety and virtue. It proceeds from, or  
 imports such notions as these, which are con-  
 trary to the absolute perfection of the divine,  
 immense and spiritual Being, That the pre-  
 sence of God is confin'd to some particular  
 parts of the universe, to the sun, the stars or  
 some eminently sacred place upon earth; and  
 that he can possibly be represented by some  
 visible similitude; or that there are some ma-  
 terial objects which give us a truer and juster  
 idea of his nature than others. It is therefore  
 necessary above all things, in order to the  
 practice of true religion, and persevering in it,  
 that we endeavour by a constant and diligent  
 attention, to fix in our minds becoming sen-  
 timents concerning the Deity, as a most pure  
 and perfect Spirit.

I have said that idolatry (which in all its  
 forms, even the most innocent of them, is an  
 error against the doctrine of the text) tends  
 to corrupt the tempers and the manners of  
 men; but the observation deserves to be far-  
 ther considered, and we may see it justified  
 by the constant experience of the world. St.  
*Paul*, in the first chapter of his epistle to the  
*Romans*, teaches us concerning the Gentiles,  
 and

and their own histories confirm it, that tho' SERM.  
they knew God, (for his works proclaim his be- IV.  
ing and perfections intelligibly to all mankind,)   
and their first and most natural sentiments  
concerning him were the best; yet not liking  
to *retain him in their knowledge, they chang'd*  
*his truth into a lie*, that is, into idolatry, built  
upon a false foundation, and repugnant to the  
real nature of the Deity. In consequence of  
which, they were abandon'd to such mon-  
strous and unnatural wickedness, as nothing  
could have drawn them into but their idola-  
trous superstition. And we find that the de-  
clensions of the *Jews* to impiety and wicked-  
ness, began with inventing means and instru-  
ments of service to the true God; but from  
thence proceeded to grosser kinds of supersti-  
tion, which at last extinguished all sense of  
virtue and humanity, carrying them to the  
unnatural cruelty of sacrificing their own chil-  
dren to *Moloch*. Even among Christians them-  
selves, superstition has had very lamentable  
effects; some of them not only substituting  
their false worship in the place of virtue, and  
making atonement by it for their sins, but  
being led by a blind zeal for their own inven-  
tions, to such barbarity, as men, without a  
pretence of religion, would never have been  
guilty of.

2dly,



SERM. 2dly, Since God is a spirit, we can never

IV. reasonably hope to please him by merely corporeal things or bodily exercises. There are, 'tis true, external acts of homage and adoration necessary to be perform'd to God. In our present state the affections of the mind are naturally express'd by outward actions, Benevolence, esteem, gratitude and other dispositions towards our fellow-creatures, are not silent and unactive in the heart. Nature and custom have taught us the proper expressions whereby they shew themselves; and if *these* be altogether omitted, we shall scarcely believe the inward principles have a being. By parity of reason, if we have internal good affections towards the Deity, the sincerity and the force of them appear by proper outward acts. But the sincerity of intention, and truly pious affections can only be acceptable to God. Without these no forms of devotion or seemingly religious works, however pompous, expensive and magnificent, are of any value at all. Such formal service not proceeding from just sentiments, nor animated by inward good affections, is unworthy of our rational spirits to perform, and unworthy of the divine Spirit to accept. What notion can any man have of the Deity, who imagines that sacrifices and other ceremoni-

ous performances will please him, when separated from virtuous dispositions and a good life? The question which the *Psalmist* puts in the name of God to the formal worshipper, is a very proper one, *Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?* \* For, however absurd that be, no better account can be given of the hypocrite's spiritless devotion, who is laborious in the forms and ceremonies of worship, but utterly negligent of moral duties, which alone he has any reason to think, can recommend him to the approbation of a pure spirit. *God does not see as man sees*; he has not those views of sensible things, nor those affections and desires to them which we have. Will he be delighted with a fine picture or an expensive statue? Are gold and silver more precious to him than common earth? Has he ears like ours, to be delighted with the melody of sounds? These are gross imaginations, unworthy of reasonable beings. Strange! that ever it should enter into the heart of a man, that he could reconcile himself to God by *thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil*, or that *offering the fruit of his body* could expiate his crimes. And yet it is certain, there is such a proneness in mankind to this sort of superstition, that not only they have been guilty of

\* *Psal.* l. 13.

SERM. it who had no other guide than the light of  
 IV. nature, trespassing thereby against the plain  
 dictates of reason, and particularly this important principle that God is a Spirit; but even they who enjoy'd the benefit of a divine revelation, have, many of them fallen into the same error, contrary to the most express warnings and reproofs given them by God's extraordinary messengers. Many of the ancient *Jews* plac'd their religion in sacrifices and other ceremonial observances, in which they trusted as sufficient to recommend them to the divine acceptance, and to make amends for the want of true repentance and reformation, notwithstanding the most express declarations of the prophets, that no external service, though of divine institution, would be acceptable to God, without purity of heart and the practice of righteousness. The prophet *Jeremy* tells them \*, that to trust in the *temple of the Lord* for their security, whilst they did not amend their lives, was to trust in *lying* words. He puts them in mind of the desolation that was brought upon *Shiloh* for the wickedness of their fathers, tho' it was a place once as sacred, and the presence of God was there, as conspicuously as afterwards in the house which was built for him in *Jerusalem*; and by that re-

\* Chap. vii. v. 4.

markable

markable example in their own history, he SERM.  
warns them that the temple would be IV.

no protection to them, if they continued in their crimes: Nay, while they were guilty of murder, adultery, oppression, fraud, perjury and idolatry, their entrance into the temple as worshippers was a profanation of it, and turning the *house of God into a den of thieves and robbers*. But if they would please God and be intitled to the accomplishment of the promises made to their fathers, they must thoroughly *amend their ways and their doings, they must execute judgment between a man and his neighbour, they must not oppress the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, nor shed innocent blood, neither walk after other gods\**. The declarations of the prophet *Isaiah* are as clear and strong against their vain confidence in their sacrifices and religious assemblies, at their new moons, sabbaths and other festivals, Chap. i. 11. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord.—I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs, or of be-goats. When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination to me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of the assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the so-*

\* Ver. 5, 6.

SERM. *lemon meeting: But wash ye, make you clean,*  
 IV. *put away the evil of your doings from before*  
*mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well,*  
*seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, plead for*  
*the widow.*

I wish *Christians* were not chargeable with the same fault; but it is certain many of them are. Tho' our Saviour has taken great care to give his followers just notions of the divine nature, and on that foundation to raise a reasonable service; and tho' the *Christian* worship has the characters of plainness and simplicity in a more eminent degree than any other form ever had, yet has it been greatly corrupted by some *Christians*: Especially the church of *Rome* has multiplied her rites and ceremonies to a greater number, and thereby made her service more burdensome than the *Jewish* institution itself was. If it was absurd in the worshippers of *Baal* to think that they could prevail with their God by cutting themselves with lances, is it not equally absurd in *Christians*, and much more inexcusable, to imagine that their God, whom they acknowledge to be a pure Spirit, will hear them for their speaking much; will be pleased with their vain repetition of formal insipid devotion, which is the exercise of the body and not of the mind; with postures and vestments which



which carnal worshippers have devised, as fondly fancying a kind of humility and decency in them; or with fastings, pilgrimages, and such like severities, which God has not commanded, and which instead of promoting repentance and true holiness, are relied upon in place of them; thus *making void the precepts of the moral law*, which are of eternal and immutable obligation?

Other *Christians* make too near approaches to the same kind of superstition, who place their religion in points of mere speculation, in a zeal for matters of small importance, or in positive duties, a diligent attendance on assemblies for worship, receiving the sacrament and such like outward performances. *These things ought not to be left undone*, because God has prescrib'd them; but they are enjoin'd to intelligent creatures, and the uses and designs of them are fully explain'd. In general they are all intended for the promoting of good dispositions in men, and the practice of virtue; and we may be assured our observance of them is no farther pleasing to God, than as they are, this way, useful to ourselves. Therefore to lay any stress on positive institutions, as if by any merit or efficacy in them, they could procure our acceptance with God, or in some other unintelligible manner, do us good, without

SERM. out contributing to our instruction, the exci-

IV. ting good affections in our minds and our progress in piety, righteousness and charity ;— This is to alter the very nature of them, to separate the means from the end to which God appointed them to be subservient, and to abuse his ordinances to superstition, which cannot be pleasing to him who is himself perfectly intelligent, and delights in the reasonable service of his creatures. And to conclude,

*Lastly*, If God is a Spirit, our duty in consequence of this principle, and in opposition to the errors already mention'd, is to *worship him in spirit and truth*, that is, with sincerity, with our best affections, and the most vigorous exercise of our inward powers. We cannot but have an abhorrence and contempt in our minds of hypocrisy. Any professions of respect to ourselves which we know to be insincere, and not to proceed from the heart, we would certainly reject with detestation as real affronts. And shall we then offer such an indignity to the omniscient Spirit? But if we consider what the service is, which our own minds upon calm and deliberate reflexion approve, we shall thereby understand what is acceptable to God. It is the homage of the heart, the inward devotion of the soul and affections, with serious attention, proceeding

from clear apprehensions and a firm persuasion of his adorable perfections, and evidencing its sincerity in our whole conversation by the fruits of holiness; it is an humble reverence for, and high esteem of his glorious excellencies, gratitude for his benefits, confidence in his mercy, submission to his will and an imitation of his purity and goodness. Wherefore, *let sinners cleanse their hands, and the double-minded purify their hearts; and thus, if they draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to them.*

SERM.  
IV.

VOL. I. K. SER.

# SERMON V.

The Unity of God prov'd from the  
apparent Unity of Design in his  
Works.

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Deuteronomy vi. 4.

*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.*

SERM. V. **S**INCE we are convinc'd by the most full and satisfying evidence, that the system of the universe is intellectual, or that the formation of the world and all its parts is to be attributed to a designing Cause; our next inquiry is, where shall that wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding? Whether in a plurality of beings, co-ordinate and independent, or in one original perfect mind? That intelligence and activity are seated in a mind as their proper subject we know. For the knowledge we have of what passes in ourselves, teaches us to distinguish between perception and a percipient, between operation and power, as the principle from which

which it proceeds; and that mind is a being SERM.  
V.  
or substance different from matter, especially }  
that spirituality must necessarily be implied in  
original intelligence, has been prov'd. The  
present question is not, whether there are other  
orders of understanding agents, superior to  
men, which may be easily allow'd upon all  
suppositions. For tho' our own reason does  
not furnish us with demonstrative proof of it,  
yet who can find any difficulty in supposing,  
(even if the world were made by chance, and  
there were no intending Cause in the origin of  
things,) that there are many minds, and many  
different species of them, whose capacities are  
much larger than ours, who have a much  
more comprehensive knowledge, and a far  
less limited sphere of action; whose manner  
and extent of perception transcends ours, as  
much as we in understanding surpass the bru-  
tal kinds; and their activity may reach to vast  
quantities of matter, whereas we are confin'd  
to a small part of it, and very unfit for great  
operations. And as there are many different  
kinds of spirits with very different degrees of  
perfection; those who maintain the unity of  
God, the first independent Cause and supreme  
Ruler of the universe, do not at all doubt of  
his employing such inferior spiritual agents, as  
the ministers of his providence. But the ques-



SERM. tion properly is concerning the original Cause  
 V. of things, and the monarchy of the world;  
 whether there be one supreme intelligent Being, to whom all other Beings owe their existence and all their powers, and who has an absolute dominion over all, the fountain of being, of understanding and power; or whether there be a variety of partial, independent, unmade causes of the universe, and all its appearances?

This last is most properly called *Polytheism*, but it has been exploded by the generality of men who have thought on this subject with any tolerable degree of attention. And indeed, the idea of a Deity, as it is explain'd both by those who assert and oppose his existence, naturally leads us to attribute singularity to him; to appropriate that character to *one*, and exclude all others from a partnership in his perfections and prerogatives. For the notion of God is of an absolutely perfect, uncaus'd, and therefore necessarily existent Being, on whom all things depend, by his intelligence directing, and by his powerful will producing whatever actually is, the whole frame of nature with all the kinds and degrees of order and perfection which it contains. Now the true subject of controversy between us and *Atheists*, is concerning the existence of  
 such

such a Being: We believe that the phenomena of the world cannot otherwise be accounted for; they maintain the contrary. But there is no appearance of reason for a plurality; the doctrine of *Theism* does not require it; for the Being of one God, absolutely perfect, is fully sufficient to all its purposes. The *Atheistical* Scheme opposes the unity of God; in fact the arguments of the *Atheists* are level'd against it; and in reason, a multitude of independent agents ununited in design and operation, so diminishes the idea of absolute perfection, and so dissipates and enervates the ruling counsel of the universe, as to sap the foundations of religion, and leave *Atheism* little to quarrel with. *Epicurus* himself, a violent adversary to the Being of the true God, the Maker of all things, yet imagin'd a multitude of independent Deities; consistently enough with his principles, excepting in one circumstance, that he said they were incorruptible, which can never be reconcil'd to his hypothesis, that all things, and even the Gods were generated by the casual encounter of atoms. But of what sort were these Deities? Only idle unactive beings, who liv'd in pleasure, without any share in the formation of the world, or in presiding over it. And the truth is, to suppose a plurality of partial inde-

SERM.

V.

SERM. pendent causes, under no common direction,  
 V. almost leaves the origin of things in the same  
 confusion, and signifies as little to the purposes of religion as the fiction of *Epicurus* \*.

The *Polytheism* of the *Gentiles* seems to be a strong argument against what I have said. It is notoriously known, that before the times of *Christianity*, mankind universally, all but the *Jews*, worshipped *many Gods and many Lords*; and not only the ignorant vulgar, but even the most eminent philosophers. How then can it be alledged that there has been any thing like an agreement, among the wise themselves, in believing the unity of God? I  
 answer,

\* If it should be supposed, that there may possibly be a plurality of eternal independent beings, the makers of the world, to whom the characters of necessary existence and absolute perfection belong, and consequently, who must be united in all their counsels and operations; for that infinitely perfect intellectual powers should differ, is a manifest absurdity: This hypothesis is imagin'd without any necessity, (all appearances being at least, as well accounted for on the contrary supposition of unity;) and supported by no argument. Besides, as multiplicity, at least possible, naturally accompanies the idea of effects, whose contingent existence and limited perfection are determined by the power and will of the designing Cause: so the idea of necessary existence and unlimited perfection seems to exclude all diversity of being. And how can it be thought that a plurality of independent, infinitely perfect beings, essentially immense, all-powerful, and all-knowing, should divest themselves of these perfections, or the exercise of them, by dividing among them the formation and government of the world, for which every one singly is allowed to be sufficient. But as no such opinion is maintain'd, so far as I know, by any adversaries of religion, nor would at all serve their purposes; I shall not insist any farther upon it, but endeavour to prove unity of design in the frame and government of the world, which is the just foundation of our pious affectionate regards to the Deity.

answer, that upon a careful inquiry into the SERM.  
 history of ancient times, it appears indeed that V.  
 learned men complied with the superstition  
 of their several countries; but at the same time  
 strenuously argued for, and profess'd to believe  
 one supreme Being, the absolute Lord of all;  
 insomuch, that if we except the *Epicureans*,  
 there is not one philosopher of note, who as-  
 serted a multitude of independent gods. There  
 are clear authentic testimonies, still remain-  
 ing, which fully prove that the most celebra-  
 ted authors among the *Persians*, the *Greeks*,  
 and even the *Egyptians*, the most idolatrous  
 of all nations, asserted that there is one unori-  
 ginated, self-existent Cause, to whom they  
 gave the characters of the GREATEST and  
 the BEST, the Maker of all things, the Fa-  
 ther of gods and men. The poets themselves,  
 the great depravers of the *Pagan* theology,  
 filling it with fables, yet plainly and fre-  
 quently declar'd this truth.

There are various accounts given of the  
*Heathen Polytheism*, or worshipping a plura-  
 lity of gods, whereby it appears to be con-  
 sistent with the acknowledgment of one su-  
 preme, undivided Monarchy of the universe.  
 As *First*, That the one eternal and self-exis-  
 tent Deity was the ultimate Object of their  
 adoration, under different names. Thus *Pan*,

SERM. and *Janus*, and *Jupiter*, and *Cælus*, and  
 V. *Saturn*, and *Pluto*, and *Apollo*, and *Minerva*,  
 —these and other Deities, so called, (however  
 the true notion of them may be disguised by  
 the fabulous inventions of the poets, and  
 even pretended histories given of their ori-  
 ginals and acts, which represent them as so  
 many derived and temporary beings,) yet the  
 testimonies collected by *Christian* writers,  
 who have search'd accurately into this mat-  
 ter, from the most sensible *Pagans*, plainly  
 shew that these several names did not signify  
 different gods: For that they had each the  
 characters of the universal *Numen* ascrib'd to  
 them, though the superstitious and credulous  
 vulgar imagin'd a diversity, which false ima-  
 gination was industriously cherish'd among  
 them for political reasons. Nor is it an ar-  
 gument of any weight to the contrary, that  
 some of the names were also used to denote  
 particular parts of the visible world, as the  
 heavens, the sun, the earth and the sea. For  
 this only shews that their theology was obscu-  
 red, as it certainly was by a multitude of am-  
 biguous words used in it; not that the wisest  
 among them did not intend by these very  
 words, that their devotion should terminate  
 on the great God, the Creator of heaven and  
 earth, which themselves expressly say they did.



It is further alledged, and very probably SERM.  
 true, that many of the *Heathens* designed by V.  
 their different denominations to signify, not  
 distinct beings, but partial considerations of  
 the supreme Deity, as manifesting himself by  
 his various works. The vast multitude of  
 creatures which are produc'd, and the num-  
 berless variety of appearances in the world,  
 (tho' all proceeding from the same original  
 Cause) might give weak minds occasion to  
 imagine a diversity of operating and govern-  
 ing principles; yet others really meant, and ex-  
 plain'd themselves as meaning, no more than  
 a diversity of effects. Thus, tho' the *Pagan*  
 worship might seem at first sight to be divided  
 between the divinity presiding in the heavens,  
 in the sun, the moon, the air, the earth, the  
 sea, and the invisible state of separate spirits;  
 yet the wiser sort intended it to the one su-  
 preme God, to whose dominion the whole  
 world is subject, whom they believed to be  
 every where present, pervading all things, as  
 they express'd themselves, and diffusing the  
 fruits of his power, wisdom and liberality  
 thro' all parts of the universe. And therefore  
 when the inanimate parts of the creation were  
 personated, and deified, such as the sun and  
 the earth, we cannot reasonably think that,  
 at least the men of sense and learning among

SERM. the *Heathens*, were so stupid as to imagine

V. that the material systems themselves were proper objects of religious invocation; but the true meaning was, either that they were animated by subordinate intelligences, whom they honoured with an inferior worship, as I shall afterwards observe, or rather that the sovereign virtues of this Deity, tho' one in the principle, yet multiform in their apparent exertions, were to be reverently acknowledged wherever they are manifested. From the deifying of the works of nature, as containing so many different manifestations of the Divine power and providence, they proceeded farther to make gods of unsubstantial things, mere accidents, such as the qualities, the affections and passions of the human mind; virtue, justice, clemency, hope, had temples consecrated to them and altars erected. Not surely that these were thought to be personal deities, subsisting by themselves, but it was designed to be acknowledged that in them the Author of nature has display'd his virtues, giving a moving force to created beings, whereby important effects are produc'd in the world.

If this was the true sense of the more intelligent *Pagans*, (and by the many quotations which learned men have taken the pains to collect from their writings, it seems to be so,)

we

we must conclude, that under an appearance of *Polytheism*, they conceal'd a real persuasion concerning the real unity of God. And this will be still more evident, if we consider what I observ'd on another occasion, that some of them worshipp'd the Deity as the soul of the world, than which, however wrong in itself, nothing can give us a clearer idea of unity, or a stronger intimation that they believed it. For as we know by our own consciousness, that the human soul is one percipient active being ; so a common soul, animating the whole system of the universe, must be apprehended to be one. I have already shewn, that this notion was gross and unworthy of the supreme Being. It is probable, that many of the philosophers who thus express'd their sentiments, intended no more than that the divine reason, as they spoke, or understanding, is intimately present with all things, wisely governing them. Some of them certainly had more sublime conceptions of the Deity, as an infinitely superior nature, the Author of the world, inhabiting it not as a Soul, but as a sovereign Ruler, who continually superintends all its affairs, and exercises a just and gracious care over them ; and some of them imagin'd a plastic and intelligent universal nature, deriv'd from him, which was properly the Soul of

SERM. of the world, and they called it a secondary

V. God. But however divided their opinions might be as to that point, they agreed in this, that the supreme Deity, the ultimate Object of worship, is One only, manifested in the several parts of the universe, either as his animated members, or his works, in which he is intimately present, continually displaying his wisdom, power and goodness; so that he *containeth all things in himself, and all things are full of him*, which they carried so far, that this was not an uncommon saying with them, *Deus unus et omnia.*

*Lastly,* It is certain that the *Pagans*, the wisest and most learned of them, designedly and avowedly worshipped inferior gods, substantial invisible powers, whom they supposed to be created or generated by the one supreme Being, either in time or from eternity, and employ'd by him as the ministers of his providence. These Deities were of several sorts, as separate spirits of various orders and degrees of perfection, who never inhabited terrestrial bodies, but were either altogether incorporeal, or possess'd only aerial or ætherial vehicles, each presiding over a particular part of the universe, as the station and province appointed to him by the universal King; and the departed souls of heroes, whom they supposed

posed to be advanc'd to a high degree of power, SERM.  
dignity and happiness, as a reward of their vir- V.  
tues, and the eminent services they had done  
to mankind, while they were upon earth.

The pretences by which the *Heathens* justified this part of their devotion were such as these; that since there are so many excellent beings, subordinate indeed to the great God, and his servants, but superior to men, and by whose ministry many and great benefits are convey'd to them, it seems reasonable that their favours should be acknowledg'd with gratitude, and that they should be honoured by men, in proportion to their dignity and beneficence. Besides, that as there is an infinite distance between the supreme Majesty, and mortals dwelling upon earth, it seems fit that they should not presume to approach his presence immediately with their adorations, but by the mediation and intercession of his favourite ministers, who continually stand before him and surround his throne. In both these sorts of worship, I mean the supreme and inferior, they used ceremonies and external symbols, especially sacrifices and images: Sacrifices, as testimonies of gratitude and acknowledgment of dependence, likewise bloody victims, as rites of deprecation, and for expiating their sins; and they used images, not as at  
all



SERM. all participating in their worship, (at least the

V. more intelligent pretended so,) but only to  
 make a more sensible impression on their  
 minds, and thereby help their devotion. Besides, some of the *Pagans* did, and some do at this day, pay a kind of religious respect to evil dæmons, from no principle but that of servile fear, intending to appease, at least mitigate their malice, and escape the harm which otherwise they might and are inclined to do; or else, men, having themselves mischievous designs, implore the assistance of wicked spirits in accomplishing them. But many others utterly disclaim this, as impious and altogether unworthy of men, who acknowledge the supreme dominion of a good God over the world, whose providence directs the whole series of events; and tho' it may permit malevolent creatures to exert their power and execute malicious designs in some instances, yet always permits them only for wise reasons, and over-rules the issue for good.

What I have said concerning the *Pagan* theology and worship, is not at all intended to excuse the errors and corruption of it. It is impossible to vindicate idolatry, or giving divine honour to others besides the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth; as the scripture speaks, *worshipping the creature be-*

*sides the Creator who is blessed for evermore.* For S E R M.

that is certainly to rebel against the clear light V.

of reason, whereby he discovers himself to us, requiring that we should glorify him as God; that is, that we should dutifully recognise his peerless Majesty, and pay him an homage which cannot possibly be due to other beings in any degree, on account of his not only unequall'd but incommunicable excellency, as the sole self-originated fountain of all being, power, wisdom and goodness. To adore the Deity as the Soul of the universe, is to confound him with his creatures, and to disparage his absolute perfection by jumbling it into one composition with the most imperfect of all things. To worship him under the partial consideration of particular benefits communicated to us, as by the sun, the earth, corn and wine, is to lead unthoughtful men, (as in fact it probably did lead many of the vulgar *Heathen*;) into that most stupid notion, that these creatures themselves are original Deities; which is rather *Atheism* than any kind of religion: And to serve angels or the departed spirits of good men religiously, as it is liable to the same inconvenience with the particular last mentioned, namely, ensnaring weak minds into that most pernicious error of attributing independent

SERM. dent Divinity to them; it has no foundation

V.

in reason, since we know not what communication those separate spirits have with us, or what knowledge of our affairs, nor have we any ground to believe it is acceptable to them; rather on the contrary, that they are displeas'd with it, as an affront to the God whose servants they are, and before whom they prostrate themselves with the humblest reverence. Besides, the *Gentile* worship, wrong in its foundation, as contrary to plain reason, was still more deprav'd by the craft of priests and politicians, who fram'd it to their own selfish purposes, not without the secret concurrence of evil spirits, intending mischief to mankind, by ensnaring them into vice and unhappiness under the specious pretence of religion. By these means the devotion of the greatest part of mankind grew to a monstrous absurdity, some of it at least so irrational, so foul, barbarous and obscene, as to be a disgrace to the human nature; and in consequence of it, as *St. Paul* very well observes in the first Chapter of his Epistle to the *Romans*, they were wretchedly debased in their morals, running into the most enormous and unnatural crimes. But however inexcusable the *Heathen* idolatry was, from the observations which have been made, I think

think it evidently appears, that amidst all SERM.  
 the corruptions which prevail'd, and not- V.  
 withstanding the strong appearances of *Poly-*  
*theism*, still that grand principle of natural  
 religion was maintain'd by the most under-  
 standing and thoughtful men, that there is  
 one only living and eternal God, and they  
 endeavour'd to explain their worship in a  
 consistency with it.

It is not to be dissembled however, that  
 there has been a real difference upon this head  
 among professed *Theists*, nay, among profes-  
 sed *Christians*; some have asserted that there  
 are two eternal, unmade, independent Prin-  
 ciples, one good and the other evil; which  
 opinion others have rejected as a very great  
 error. The philosopher of greatest note who  
 maintained the being of an eternal evil dæ-  
 mon, the author of all the mischief and  
 disorder that is in the world, was *Plu-*  
*tarch* the celebrated moralist. He pretends  
 indeed, that he was not singular in this notion,  
 but that some of the most learned among the  
*Persians* and *Egyptians*, as well as *Greeks*,  
 especially *Plato*, went before him in it;  
 which in all probability is a mistake, at least  
 with respect to *Plato*, and the other eminent  
*Grecians*. For the sentiments of the *Persian*  
*Magi*, it is more doubtful, whether *Arima-*  
*nus*,

SERM. *nius*, whom their theology represented as


V. the head of the opposition to goodness, were understood by them to be a substantial, unmade, independent principle or not. Among the sects of profess'd *Christians*, almost every one knows that *Manes* and his followers were charg'd with this error, (and from him it bears the name of *Manicheism* to this day;) how justly, it is hard to determine, for it is certain that the history of ancient heresies is involv'd in great darkness. However that be, the grounds of the opinion are of much greater importance, and more necessary to be considered than the history of its rise and progress. Now what gave the principal, I may say, the only occasion to it, was the difficulty, and, as the abettors of it alledge, the impossibility of accounting otherwise for the origin of evil. Shall we, say they, attribute all the good that is in the world to a good aauthor, and from his works infer his being and his moral character, which is allow'd to be a just way of reasoning; and shall we not, in like manner, impute the evil that is in the world, to an evil cause? Or is it to be imagined, that a Being essentially good, would have produc'd or even permitted, when it was in his power to have prevented, so much wickedness and so much unhappiness as we see among mankind? It is plain,



plain, that the point thus stated is not proper for our present consideration, because it is apparently an objection against the goodness of God, and we have not yet proceeded so far in our inquiry as to any of his moral perfections. I shall therefore wave it at this time, and only argue against the *Ditheistic* scheme, as well as *Polytheism*, from the foundations already laid, that is, I will, in the remaining part of this discourse, consider whether the proofs which have been adduc'd from the Being of God, or an universal, designing and active intelligence in the world, will lead us this one step farther, to conclude the unity of that intelligence or not?

The only argument which has been insisted on for the existence of a Deity, or an intelligent Cause of all things, is taken from the evidence of design in the formation of the universe, and its several parts; in the obvious and most common appearances of the material system, such as the variety and uniformity, which, upon the slightest view, we cannot but observe in the works of nature, the apparent harmony and order of our world, and the mutual relation of its parts, as the heavens, the air and the terraqueous globe, divided into collections of waters and dry land, in each of which are numerous living inhabi-

SERM. tants, suited by the frame and texture of their

V.  bodies to their proper elements; in the production of animals and their various kinds, preserv'd unmix'd, and propagated by a settled never-failing law; in the principal phenomena of the animal life, sensation and self-motion; and especially in the human understanding, its abstract notions, its knowledge of eternal truths, and above all its knowledge of morality, of so great and important use to the perfection of the intelligent Nature, and the common advantage of the whole species. Now if we review all these particulars and compare them together, we shall see that they discover not only design in the origin and contrivance of them, but unity of design, and therefore that all things are derived from one eternal source of intelligence and activity, or one God. But I shall content myself with making a few remarks on some of them, especially on their mutual dependence and connexion, directing us to consider them as parts of one system, and consequently as proceeding from one intelligent Cause.

*First,* As gravity is the common quality of all bodies, arising not from the nature and properties of matter, nor to be explain'd without the agency of a foreign Cause, yet producing numberless uniform effects in the corpo-  
real

real system; it is in all reason to be attributed SERM.  
V.

to one contrivance, rather than the different designs of two or more partial independent causes. What a vast variety of appearances in nature depend on this one? The self-balanc'd earth hangs upon its centre; the mountains are set fast; there is a perpetual flux and reflux of the sea; vapours continually arise; the clouds are balanced till by their own weight they descend in rain; animals breathe and move; the heavenly bodies hold their stations and go on in their constant course, by the force of gravity, after the *ordinance* of that wisdom which appointed them this law. Now when we see a multitude of effects proceeding from one Cause, effects so various in their kind and so important, a Cause simple and unvaried in all the diversity produc'd by it, can we avoid ascribing this to an unity of intelligence, if there be intelligence in it at all? For could we suppose different independent beings, acting with different designs, and by distinct operations to have form'd the several parts of the world, and the several species of creatures which are in it, what reason can be imagin'd why they should all be govern'd by, and all necessarily depend upon, one law? The Maker of the sun, or if a partial cause of nature could be suppos'd to have an understand-

SERM. ing large enough for it, the Contriver of the  
 V. whole visible heavens, must, one would think,  
 have finish'd his scheme independently on any  
 other, without borrowing aid from the work  
 of another God. In like manner the Gods of  
 the seas and of the dry land, and the Creator  
 of animals would have compleated their several  
 systems, each by itself, not depending on  
 any other for its order and preservation.  
 Whereas, on the contrary, we see in fact they  
 are none of them independent, but all held  
 together by the common bond of gravity.  
 The heavens and the earth continue in their  
 situations at a proper distance from each other  
 by the force of this law; the sea keeps within  
 its channels; and animals live and move by it.  
 All which leads us to acknowledge one directing  
 Counsel in the whole frame. For what  
 but an understanding which comprehends the  
 whole extent of nature, reaching from the utmost  
 circuit of heaven to the center of the earth,  
 could have fixed such a common law, so necessary  
 to all its parts, that without it not one of them  
 could subsist, nor the harmony of the whole be  
 preserved? The strict cohesion of the parts which  
 constitute particular bodies, requires a peculiar  
 cement, different from that of the gravitating  
 force; and as it can never be explain'd by the  
 nature and properties of matter

matter itself, and is absolutely necessary to the SERM.  
forms and the uses of bodies in the several far V.  
distant regions of the world, it must in like  
manner be attributed to the contrivance of an  
understanding, and the agency of a power  
which takes in the whole corporeal system;  
not to a partial Cause limited in its intelli-  
gence and operation.

2dly, The beautiful order and harmony of  
the universe, since it must be acknowledg'd  
to be the work of understanding, has all the  
appearance which is necessary to satisfy any  
fair inquirer, of its being form'd under the  
direction of our governing wisdom. Discon-  
certed counsels can never produce harmony.  
If a plurality of intelligent causes pursue each  
his separate design, disunion will continually  
cleave to their works; but when we see an  
intire piece made up of many parts, all cor-  
responding to each other, and conspiring to-  
gether so as to answer one common end,  
we naturally conclude unity of design. As a  
work of art is formed according to the pre-  
conceived idea of a designing artificer, with-  
out which it has not its necessary intireness  
and uniformity, the same may be observ'd  
in the works of nature. A tree is as much  
one as a house; an animal as compleat a  
system in itself, (only much more curiously  
fram'd,)



**SERM.** fram'd,) as a clock. If we carry our views

V. farther into nature, and take in whole regions of the universe, with all their contents, the same characters of unity are still visible. The earth itself is not a confus'd mass, or a medley of incoherent and unrelated parts, but a well contrived fabric, fitted and plainly design'd for use. If we consider what a multitude of living creatures are in it of different kinds and degrees of perfection, each sort having proper apartments assign'd them, where they dwell conveniently together, with suitable provision made for them, and instincts directing them to the use of it; if we consider the interests of the several kinds, not interfering in the main, but rather serviceable to each other, furnished with necessary defences against the inconveniencies to which they are liable, either by the preventing care of nature, which without any thought of their own has provided for their safety, by the appointed advantages of their situation, or by an implanted wisdom directing them to find out the means of it; and if we consider the constant interposition of the same liberal intelligent nature, appearing by the daily new productions from the same fertile womb of the earth, whereby the returning wants of animals are reliev'd with fresh supplies; all the species of living things  
having

having the common benefit of the air, with-  
out which they could not subsist, and the  
light of the sun, which cannot at once illumi-  
nate the whole globe, being dispensed among  
them with so good œconomy, that they have  
every one what is sufficient to guide them in  
the exercise of their proper functions, that they  
may fulfil the purposes of their being;—when  
we consider all this, can we doubt but the  
earth is dispos'd and govern'd by one intend-  
ing Cause? If in a large house, wherein are  
many mansions, and a vast variety of inhabi-  
tants, there appears exact order, all from the  
highest to the lowest continually attending  
their proper business, and all lodg'd and con-  
stantly provided for suitably to their several  
conditions; we find ourselves obliged to ac-  
knowledge one wise œconomy. And if in a  
great city or commonwealth there be a per-  
fectly regular administration, so that not only  
the whole society enjoys an undisturbed peace,  
but every member has the station assign'd him  
which he is best qualified to fill; the unen-  
vied chiefs constantly attend their more im-  
portant cares, serv'd by the busy inferiors,  
who have all a suitable accommodation, and  
food convenient for them, the very meanest  
ministring to the public utility and protected  
by the public care; if, I say, in such a com-  
munity

SERM.  
V.

SERM. munity we must conclude there is a ruling

V. Counsel, which if not naturally, yet is politically one, and unless united, could not produce such harmony and order; much more have we reason to recognize one governing Intelligence in the earth, in which there are so many ranks of beings dispos'd of in the most convenient manner, having all their several provinces appointed to them, and their several kinds and degrees of enjoyment liberally provided for, without encroaching upon, but rather being mutually useful to each other, according to a settled and obvious subordination. What else can account for this but a sovereign Wisdom, a common provident nature presiding over, and caring for the whole?

But the earth, as great as it appears to us, complicated in its frame, and having such a variety in its constitution, sustaining and nourishing so many tribes of animals, yet is not an intire system by itself, but has a relation to, and dependence on other parts of the universe, as well as the beings it contains have upon it. It owes its stability to the common law of gravitation; it derives its light and its heat from the sun, by which it is render'd fruitful and commodious to its inhabitants. In short, a bond of union runs through the whole circle of being, as far as human knowledge reaches; and

and we have reason to make the same judgment concerning the parts of the world which we do not know, and to conclude that they all together compose one great whole, which naturally leads us to acknowledge one supreme uniting Intelligence. To object against this, the possibility of wild confusion reigning in worlds unknown, is to feign and not to argue; and to suppose disorder prevalent in an infinity of being which we are unacquainted with, which is the *Atheistic* hypothesis, is to take away all rational foundation for regularity any where, tho' we see it actually obtains every where, as far as our observation can reach. But confining our speculations on this subject within the compass of known existence, as we ought to do in a fair inquiry, the apparent order of the effects is a strong evidence of unity in the Cause. For if different independent causes produced, each a part, why are there no footsteps of this in the whole extent of nature? Why does not so much as one piece appear, as the separate monument of its author's power and wisdom? From divided counsels one would naturally expect interfering schemes; but on the contrary, we see an universal harmony. Men indeed from a sense of their indigence, and by the direction of instincts, which must be attributed to the designing

SERM. signing author of their constitution, join in  
 V. societies; which, tho' compos'd of many, are  
 govern'd by one counsel: But that is only  
 an artificial union, a submission to the majority, or to those who have the supreme power delegated to them, rather than an agreement in design. But this cannot be the case of independent beings, self-existent, and each compleat in itself, without relation to any other. And yet we see in nature a perfect harmony, from whence it is plain there must be an agreement at least in counsel and design, if we could suppose a plurality of independent causes. But whence comes this agreement? To say by chance, is *atheistically*, and very unreasonably to attribute the most perfect of all effects, universal order, to no cause at all. If we say by design, it must be one comprehensive design, forming the whole scheme of nature and providence, which directly brings us to what we are looking for, one sovereign commanding Intelligence in the universe, or one God. This was the argument by which some of the ancient philosophers prov'd that there is one only eternal and independent Principle, the Fountain of being and the Author of all things. *Pythagoras* called it a *Monad*; and *Aristotle* argu'd from the phenomena that all things are plainly co-ordered,



ordered, to one, the whole world conspiring into agreeing harmony: Whereas if there were many independent principles, the system of the world must needs have been incoherent and in conspiring; like an ill agreeing *drama*, botch'd up of many impertinent *intersections*. And he concludes that things are well administr'd, which they could not be under the government of many, alluding to the verse in *Homer*, Οὐκ ἀγλαῶ Πολυκαιρανίη, εἰς Κοίρανος ἐστὼ.

3dly, The condition and order of inferior, derived, and evidently dependent intelligent agents, shew not only intelligence, but unity of intelligence in the Cause of them. Every man, a single active conscious self, is the image of his Maker. There is in him one undivided animating principle, which in its perceptions and operations runs through the whole system of matter that it inhabits; it perceives for all the most distant parts of the body; it cares for all, and governs all, leading us, as a resemblance, to form an idea of the one great quickening Spirit which presides over the whole frame of nature, the spring of motion and all operation in it, understanding and active in all the parts of the universe, not as its soul indeed, but as its Lord, by whose vital directing influence it is, tho' so vast a bulk, and consisting of so many parts, united  
 evodA into

SERM.  
V.

SERM. into one regular fabric. Again, the general

V.

apparent likeness which there is among all the individuals of the human kind, is a strong evidence of their being the children of one Father.

I do not mean principally the similitude of the exterior form ; (tho' even that, in reason, should be attributed to the direction of one intelligent Cause,) but that whereby we are especially God's offspring, our intellectual capacities, which, as far as we can judge, are very nearly alike. A great difference there may be, no doubt there is, in the improvement of them ; but the powers themselves, and all the original modes of perception, in the different individuals of mankind, seem to resemble each other, as much as any real distinct things in nature. Now from a multitude, or a constant series of similar effects which do not arise from necessity, we infer unity of design in the Cause. So great a number of rational beings as the whole human race, dispos'd of in the same manner, endued with like faculties and affections, having many, and those principal things in their condition common, provided for out of the same fund and made for the same purposes, may reasonably be supposed to belong to one family ; to be deriv'd from the same origin, and still under the same paternal care.

Above

Above all, the moral capacity of mankind, SERM.  
which is a most important part of their con- V.

stitution, tending to the highest perfection of their nature, and the principal bond of regular society among them, as it proceeds from a wise intending Cause, shews unity of wisdom in the Cause; and the government over the moral, as well as the natural world, evidently appears to be a monarchy. Since, as I observ'd before, a sense of good and evil in characters and actions is indelibly imprinted on every human heart; and there are affections of very great force planted in our minds, whereby we are determin'd to act according to that sense; and since this is the effect of an original constitution, interwoven with the very frame of our nature, and no otherwise to be accounted for than by the design of its Author; let us see how this is to be explain'd upon the contrary suppositions of one Supreme, or a plurality of independent governing minds. The evident tendency of virtue is not only to the private happiness of single persons, but the good of the whole kind; an universal benevolence links us together and interests every one of us in the affairs of another, so far as to desire and endeavour their safety and happiness, not inconsistently with our own. There are other particular determinations of the virtuous kind,

SERM. such as compassion, natural affection, gratitude

V. and the love of our country, so confessedly  
 natural to men, as by common consent to  
 obtain the name of humanity, but so prevalent  
 in some as to put them upon the most self-  
 denying and hazardous enterprizes, nay, to  
 sacrifice their private interests, even to their  
 very lives, for the good of others; and these  
 determinations of the human mind every one  
 must see, do not center in itself, but that the  
 ultimate intention and effect of them is to pro-  
 mote the good of the whole species. Now if  
 we are thus form'd with design, and if this  
 constitution be the result of intelligence, is it  
 reasonable to attribute it to different intelli-  
 gences, having different views, each framing  
 and pursuing a several scheme, when the  
 principal effect, which in a work of wisdom  
 must be the principal intention, is not the se-  
 parate good of one or a few, as it must have  
 been upon the hypothesis of various indepen-  
 dent causes, each caring for his own work-  
 manship, but the common good of all? Or ra-  
 ther does not this view of the constitution,  
 which is a very plain and natural one, pointing  
 out its main end, evidently shew that the  
 whole collective body of mankind, compre-  
 hending *all the nations of men, which are made  
 of one blood to dwell upon the face of the whole  
 earth,*

*earth, is the family of one God, the father of* SERM.  
*all, who is above all, and through all, and in* V.  
*all?* It is true, there are found in men dispositions contrary to virtue, which produce effects hurtful to society, and destructive of the common peace and happiness; yet this does not prove a contrariety in the constitution, which must be attributed to the influence of opposite causes in the frame and contrivance of it. Whether these bad dispositions are an argument against the goodness of the Author, shall be consider'd in its proper place. In the mean time we may observe, that not only we have powerful instincts, whereby we are prompted to pursue the greatest universal happiness of mankind; but we are under the greatest necessity that voluntary agents can be under, of acting according to those instincts, because of the connexion our doing so has with our own happiness. For we cannot otherwise be approv'd to our own minds, nor consequently have any true self-enjoyment; which plainly shews that the governing design of the human frame was one, namely the good of the whole; and therefore that the one Father of all men is the Author of it; tho' he has made us in an imperfect state, and not without the possibility of rebelling against the law of our nature.



SERM. From this may be infer'd the whole duty  
 V. of man, summ'd up by our Saviour in these  
 two branches, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy  
 God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,  
 and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy  
 neighbour as thy self.* The obligation of the  
 latter, the love of our neighbour, or every one  
 of mankind, arises from the law of our crea-  
 tion. Since we are children of the same fami-  
 ly, the offspring of one father, and plac'd un-  
 der a constitution which is wisely and gra-  
 ciously intended for the greatest and most ex-  
 tensive good of the whole kind, what can be  
 more natural and reasonable, than that we  
 should do all the good offices in our power to  
 each other? This is to answer the end of our  
 being, and to work together with God. The  
 inanimate creatures serve the purposes for  
 which they were made, without any thought;  
 and the brutal species act according to their  
 instincts, without discerning the design of  
 them. But since God has indued us with a  
 capacity of understanding the end of his own  
 works, and of our own powers and affections,  
 is it not evident that we ought to fulfil that  
 end, in a nobler manner, not by an unintel-  
 ligent necessity, but voluntarily? It is true,  
 we have a principle of self-love planted in us,  
 which, far from thwarting the design of the  
 social

social affections, is perfectly consistent with SERM.  
it, and ministers to it; for the care of every V.  
individual, is for the good of the whole species.

But to confine our affections and our cares to ourselves, neglecting the offices which arise from the relation we have to men, as our brethren, is to trespass against the established order of the world, and to violate the respect which we owe to the one God and Father of all, who is the Author of it.

2dly, The principal duty of mankind is to love the Lord their God and to serve him. This follows directly from the acknowledgment of his unity. And accordingly *Moses* having, in the text, called upon *Israel* to hearken to this important truth that the Lord our God is one Lord, immediately adds in the following verse, *and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.* The same duty is otherwise express'd at the 13th verse, refer'd to and thus quoted by our Saviour, \* *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* The constitution of our minds leads us directly to that honour and service God requires, so that we need not say *who shall ascend to heaven for us, or descend to the deep, to bring us instruction*

M 2

con-

\* Matt. iv. 10.

SERM. concerning our duty to him: The knowledge

V. of it is *near us, even in our hearts.* If we look attentively into ourselves, we shall find that intelligence necessarily attracts our esteem, and that gratitude to a benefactor is the natural growth of our minds: an inward veneration arises for wisdom display'd in a variety of works wherein one noble end is regularly pursued; and good communicated with design, produces warm affections in every heart which deliberately attends to it, and is not under a strong unnatural prepossession. Now since our reason convinces us that all the wisdom of the universe centers in one mind; that all the effects of intelligence which we behold in the universal system of nature, are to be attributed to one Cause; that all the scattered rays of intellectual light which we discern in limited, dependent understandings, are but emanations from one eternal fountain of wisdom, and all the good we possess, or see, flows from one never-failing, bountiful Spring; then in all reason, according to the direction of our intelligent nature, our highest esteem and most intense affection should be plac'd on that eternal Mind, that glorious, perfectly wise and benevolent Cause of all things. He is intitled to a peculiar honour from us, such as no other being can claim; we ought to have the greatest

est respect for him in our hearts, and carry it <sup>SERM.</sup>  
always with the humblest reverence towards <sup>V.</sup>  
him in our whole behaviour. So reasonable is  
that rule of revealed religion, and which is  
one principal design of it, that men laying  
aside all superstition and idolatry, should wor-  
ship and serve the true God, the supreme  
Being alone, *and have no other gods before him* ;  
still remembring that *he is a Spirit, and they*  
*that worship him acceptably, must worship him*  
*in spirit and truth*, not with outward forms of  
devotion, which, when separated from good  
dispositions of mind and the obedience of our  
lives, cannot please him, but with the imi-  
tation of his holiness and goodness, and obey-  
ing his precepts of eternal and immutable  
righteousness, according to that excellent de-  
claration of the Apostle St. John, \* *This is the*  
*love of God that we keep his commandments.*

\* 1 John v. 3.

## S E R M O N VI.

Absolute Eternity explain'd, and  
shewn to be a peculiar Attribute  
of GOD.

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Pfal. xc. 2.

*From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.*

SERM.  
VI. **A**LL men, who believed the being of God, have ever agreed in ascribing eternity to him as an absolute perfection of his nature, tho' 'tis impossible for our minds to comprehend it. We have very clear notions of intelligence and activity, which, being conscious of them in ourselves, we can easily ascribe to other beings in a greater or lesser degree. But a present existence which was from everlasting or without beginning, that is, an infinite duration now actually past,—this at the first proposal overwhelms our feeble understandings, and our ideas of it must be inadequate. It becomes us therefore to enter on the consideration of this subject with a sense of our own weakness,



ness, and with a resolution to rest satisfied, if we have convincing proof that God is, in the highest sense eternal; tho' there may be puzzling objections rais'd against it, which really amount to no more than this, that the object is too big for our faculties, and that we cannot by searching find it out, nor understand it to perfection.

The words eternal, everlasting, for ever, and others of the like import, have different significations in common speech and in scripture. Sometimes they mean no more than a very long duration; sometimes a continuance so long as the subject to which they are applied shall exist. The highest sense in which they are used concerning created beings, is that of an endless future subsistence: Thus they denote the immortality of the human spirit and of angels, and the never ending felicity of good men after this life. But the eternity of God is the unchangeable permanency of his being, as compleat in himself and independent, not only without end, but without beginning, which is the most perfect manner of existence. Whatever is deriv'd from another voluntary and intelligent cause, or receives its limited condition of being from it, is always subject to, and may cease to be, by the power and will of that Cause. But he who is unorigi-

SERM. ginated, and therefore absolutely unlimited

VI. and totally self-sufficient, remains, in the strictest sense, eternally the same; liable to no alteration by any power, and, as it is express'd in the text, *from everlasting to everlasting God*. I shall in this discourse, *First*, endeavour to prove the doctrine of God's eternity. *Secondly*, to shew what are the most proper, tho' they are imperfect conceptions, we can form of it. And then I will make some practical reflections.

*First*, To prove the doctrine of God's eternity, and the most intelligible method of proceeding in it, is, I think, by the following steps. *First*, the idea of eternal duration naturally forces itself upon the human mind. We may indeed, abstract from the consideration of any particular being, or of all beings as existent in it, or we may imagine an eternal nothing; but still the idea of eternity will remain. Now the difficulties which attend our notion of the Divine eternity, seem equally to attend the notion of eternity, unapplied to the existence of any being. For shall it be said that the duration of the Deity without succession, is what we can have no idea of, and on the other hand, his eternal successive duration is alike inconceivable, as supposing infinity unequal, and capable of addition and diminution.

minution? And may not the same be said concerning duration considered abstractly? These difficulties therefore ought not to be made objections against God's being from everlasting to everlasting, since they equally lie against an abstract duration without beginning and without end; which yet is inseparable from our thoughts. The truth is, such reasonings only shew us the imperfection of our own understandings; that have real ideas familiar and unavoidable, of things which they cannot comprehend, namely, ideas of duration and space, necessarily growing up to infinity, too large therefore for the human mind to grasp, being itself finite. We know they are, but do not know what they are; we know they are both divisible into so small parts that we cannot discern the least of them, and both of so great an extent that we cannot attain to the knowledge of their utmost bounds. Shall we then object against the eternity of God as incomprehensible? And yet we cannot avoid thinking on, and being persuaded of eternity, which without him, is equally incomprehensible.

*Secondly,* It has been universally acknowledged, even by *Atheists* who pretended to reason for their opinions, that something must have existed from eternity; and that if there ever had been nothing, there never could have been

SERM. been any thing. Indeed 'tis difficult to imagine  
VI. how this could be denied by any man ; for  
we cannot conceive of a commencement of being otherwise than as an effect, and an effect without a cause is too palpable an absurdity for any one to maintain ; it is really an effect which at the same time is not an effect. Vain therefore are the cavils of unbelievers against the eternity of God, which must equally affect all their own hypotheses, an eternal chaos, an infinite succession of worlds, or an infinite series of dependent causes. Again, our minds attribute, and cannot avoid attributing duration to all beings of which they have any knowledge. We are conscious of it in ourselves, by attending to the succession of our own thoughts ; and we cannot help conceiving it to be inseparable from all existence. But what kind of duration shall we attribute to an uncaused being ? It must be without a beginning, as the existence is without a cause ; the supposition of a beginning necessarily importing the possibility of a cause. So that if the mind finds itself constrained to assent to this proposition, that there is an uncaused being, it seems to be under the same necessity of acknowledging that being to be without beginning, or absolutely eternal. And tho' our ideas of uncaused and eternal

are

are negative, the meaning of that expression SERM.  
is not, that nothing positive is intended by VI.  
these words; for then they could not signify  
the attributes of any being, and uncaused  
eternal existence would be a contradiction in  
terms. But the negation only is of our fully  
understanding the subject, and the mind ap-  
prehends as implied, real attributes of the  
Deity, which transcend its own capacity to  
conceive, a positive manner and duration of  
existence above its comprehension.

*Thirdly,* It appears also certain that intelli-  
gence is eternal. It has been already prov'd,  
that intelligence is discover'd in the formation  
and constitution of things; therefore it must  
have been in the origin of the world, and before  
it; for the Cause, I mean the voluntary direct-  
ing and contriving Cause, must be before the  
effect. If it be alledged that the argument  
amounts to no more than that intelligence  
was before the present system which we see,  
or whatever we have any knowledge of, not  
that it is absolutely without beginning;—I an-  
swer, if it appears with sufficient evidence,  
that wisdom is the first thing and the first  
principle of all things, of which we have any  
knowledge, whether animate or inanimate,  
sensitive or rational, this is sufficient to our  
purpose; and to flee to the arbitrary supposi-  
tion



SERM. tion of bare possibility beyond the compass of

VI. known existence, is a poor refuge, unworthy of a fair reasoner, when the inquiry is concerning what has actually existed. If it be certain beyond all rational contradiction, that something has existed from everlasting, and there is no difficulty or pretence of argument against the eternity of intelligence, but what is equally against the eternity of any existence whatever; and if it be also certain, that there is nothing we can discern or fix our thoughts upon in the whole circle of being, but what, in the production and the frame of it, must be attributed to intelligence in the Cause, so that it must be acknowledg'd prior to the whole known universe; the conclusion seems to be very evident that intelligence is absolutely eternal.

Besides, the very same reasoning which demonstrates that something must have existed from eternity, proves also that understanding is eternal, or without beginning. For as Non-entity could never have produc'd being, so unintelligent Being could never have produc'd understanding. To imagine it, is the same absurdity, as in the other case, to imagine an effect without a cause. And not to insist on this, which yet is very plain to any attentive mind, that to deny intelligence to a Cause,

Cause, is really to deny causality or efficiency SERM.  
altogether, there being properly no cause but VI.

a voluntary and designing, that is, an intelligent one; the transition is as great, (and requires no less power to effect it,) from mere senseless inanimate being to intellectual capacities, as from nothing to existence. And *Lastly*, to deny intelligence to the first Cause, or, which amounts to the same, to say that something unintelligent existed before it, and produc'd it, is to attribute the order and all the appearances of the world to chance, or necessity, or to nothing, if not immediately, yet remotely; that is, to run directly into *Atheism*, which has been already refuted; or at least into as great an absurdity as any *Atheist* has ever yet advanced, namely, that indeed intelligence produc'd the regular system of the universe, but mere hazard or undesigning necessity, as a præ-existent Cause, produc'd intelligence.

*Lastly*, The active intelligence which form'd the world, and still governs it, is seated in one eternal Mind; the effects of it are diffus'd through the whole extent of being; and there is no one appearance in the universal system of nature in which it is not manifested, and which is not under its direction; but the source is one everlasting spring of thought, one conscious understanding principle. This

SERM. I shall take for granted as already prov'd. For

VI. if there be one Cause of all things, in whom they consist, form'd by his sovereign power and wisdom, into a regular whole under his supreme absolute dominion, it must be acknowledged that he is before all things. The *Atheistic* scheme agrees with ours in acknowledging eternity; nay, the human understanding must necessarily acknowledge it, it being impossible for it, as was before observ'd, to remove from itself the idea of eternal duration. It is agreed farther, that something has existed from eternity; but that scheme fixes on no individual permanent being to which the character of eternal belongs, unless it be chance or necessity, which are only confus'd general notions, rather empty insignificant names; and with respect to individual beings, eternity is the attribute of none, but belongs to a series of separate existences; which is at least as difficult to conceive as the everlasting duration of a single absolutely perfect being. But if it be true, and it has been prov'd, that the character eternal must be ascrib'd to the one intelligent Cause of all things, this leads us to the idea of a peculiar condition or manner of existence. While it is undetermined to a certain object in our thoughts, and unappropriated to a singular existence, it seems to be

appre-

apprehended no otherwise than as a long continuance, or as duration in general, which is common to all beings, not distinguished by any differences in their nature; it belongs just the same way to the most excellent and the most contemptible of all things. But the idea of eternity, as solely the attribute of one intelligent Being, carries in it what must appear to our minds grand, and attractive of a special veneration, as shall be afterwards observ'd. In the mean time this leads me to what I propos'd in the next place,

*Secondly,* To shew what seem to be the most proper, tho' they are imperfect conceptions, we can form of the Divine eternity. And *First*, it includes self-existence, necessary existence, and independence. These are characters of the supreme Being, of which we have very imperfect and inadequate ideas, because there is nothing that we are conscious of in ourselves, nor does any thing appear in the objects we perceive by our senses, and from these sources are deriv'd all the first materials of our knowledge; there is nothing, I say, that we know, which bears the least resemblance to the self-existence, necessary existence, and independence of the Deity, or can give us any notion of them. The self-existence of God is not to be understood  
in

SERM. in this positive sense, that he produc'd him-

VI. self, or was the cause of his own being; for that is evidently an absurdity, supposing him to be both prior and posterior in nature, both cause and effect; but it signifies, that as he did not arise from nothing, (which is true concerning all beings,) so he was not produc'd by any other, which must be true concerning a being absolutely and in the highest sense eternal. I doubt our understandings do not proceed much farther in distinct and positive knowledge, by adding the character of necessarily existent, which seems to mean little more than that since the Deity was not caus'd by an external agent, his existence and perfections could not be hinder'd by any. For as to an antecedent necessity in the nature of the thing, consider'd as a foundation for us to reason upon, inferring from it an apparent impossibility of not being, or that the supposition of non-existence implies an express contradiction; this I'm afraid is, at least not obvious enough to every capacity. Indeed if the impossibility of the Deity's not being, or that the supposition of his non-existence implies an express contradiction, can be clearly conceived, it puts a speedy end to all controversy with *Atheists*. But it does not with full and satisfying evidence strike every, even attentive mind;



mind; for which reason it is necessary to use other arguments. The independence of the Divine Being carries in it the same idea I have been mentioning, only with this addition, that in all the periods of duration, his eternal existence, and self-sufficient because underiv'd perfections, cannot be affected by any external cause; for it is not to be apprehended, that what receives its being, and whatever belongs to the perfection of its state from no cause, can, for its continuance depend upon, or be subject to any external power.

It may not be amiss however, tho' these characters, self-existent, necessarily existent, and independent, be very obscure, and our ideas of them very inadequate, to consider them a little further, with a view to the pretensions which other beings besides the Deity may have to them; and if it appears, that there is no ground for such pretensions, we shall be the more convinc'd that we rightly appropriate them to him, as the peculiar attributes of his eternal existence. Since all men are agreed that something must have been from eternity, they must all consequently say, that that thing, whatever it were, existed of itself necessarily and independently. Accordingly, the *Atheists* acknowledge necessary existence to be the attribute of the material world, whether of

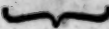
SERM. bare matter, or matter and motion, or of the

VI. form also in which it appears; and the most

strenuous modern asserters of *Atheism* have declar'd for the last of these opinions, agreeably to another principle of theirs, that there is no such thing as free agency, but that God himself, (meaning by that word universal substance,) operates only by necessity; so that things could not possibly be otherwise than they are, even as to the manner and order of their subsistence. I have on another occasion, shewn that the multiform appearances, which we see in the face of nature, cannot reasonably be attributed to necessary causes. And indeed, considering what we are conscious of, namely, that some alterations in the form and order of material objects, depend on our own power and will; considering this, I say, it is surprising any man should think that none of them could possibly be otherwise than as they now actually are; much more is it surprising, when we consider the variety of objects and events which daily occur to us, that it should be imagin'd none of them could have happen'd in any other manner than they do, not because they are directed by unerring Wisdom, but from an impossibility in the nature of things, or want of power to have determin'd otherwise; for that is the real mean-

ing of their being produc'd by a necessity of SERM.  
nature. If we know any thing at all, we VI.  
know there is a great diversity of beings in  
the universe, each having a singular and separate  
existence, independent on the rest. What  
connection is there between the being of a  
horse and a fish, of a tree upon this earth and  
a fixed star in the far distant heavens? Can  
all these things, the whole system and every  
one of its parts exist necessarily, so that not  
one individual of any kind, nor even the most  
minute particle in their composition, could  
possibly be wanting? One would think such  
a world has the least appearance of being un-  
derived and self-existent, which seems rather  
to be a manner of being perfectly uniform and  
uncompounded, as absolutely necessary and  
proceeding from no cause. At the same time  
there is an apparent relation of particular  
things, and the parts of the universe to each  
other, which has been prov'd, and every one  
may see it, as between animals and the earth,  
fishes and the sea, the whole terraqueous globe  
and the heavens. This plainly discovers wisdom  
in their Cause, not their necessary existence,  
which is absolute in itself, and unrelated to  
any thing. *2dly*, Motion, upon which the  
appearances of the material world, depend,  
is not necessary; for whereas that which is self-

SERM. 'existent is uniform, and without variation,

VI.  nothing appears to be farther from that character than motion. It is by our senses only we have any idea of it; and they represent it as the most precarious of all things, in its being, forms and degrees, as begun, increas'd, diminish'd and chang'd arbitrarily; insomuch that the first self-evident axiom concerning it is this, that all bodies continue in their state of motion or rest, till it be alter'd by a force impress'd upon them. And *lastly*, bare matter, the most passive and variable of all things, the most evidently dependent in its state, infinitely divisible, compounded, and circumscrib'd in its being, having no power but that of inactivity, has of all others the least claim to necessary or self-existence. Since therefore it is agreed on all hands, that these attributes, self-existence, necessary existence and independence must belong to some being, as having an inseparable connexion with absolute eternity; and since none of those things which have been set up in opposition, have any title to them; it remains that they are the sole unalterable characters of that supreme intelligent being, who is absolutely, in the highest sense eternal, and the first Cause of all things.

2dly, Another perfection necessarily connected with absolute eternity, is unchangeableness;

ableness; and it seems to be designedly expressed in the text, *from everlasting to everlasting thou art God*, possessing the same uniform and unvaried being, in all the periods of duration. God is the same that he was before the world began; indeed without beginning, and shall continue without any change for ever. The scripture often delivers this doctrine in very strong and emphatical terms, as in *Rev. i. 4. From him which is and which was, and which is to come*; not barely meaning that the divine Nature subsists in different successive periods, which in some sense may be said concerning other beings, but that the one God and Father of all is rightly described by this peculiar character, the Being which is, and which was, and which is to come; who, in himself immutably excellent, possesses all his perfections, glory and happiness, *without variable-ness or shadow of turning*, in past, present, and future duration. In this respect other beings are compar'd with God, and he is prefer'd to those of them which seem to be the most firm and stable. The frame of the heavens above, which has continued so long, and the foundations of the earth laid so strong and deep, yet may be changed. The scripture tells us *they shall perish, yea all of them shall wax old like a garment, and as a vesture be*

SERM.  
VI.



SERM. *changed*: But God who effects all changes in

VI. nature, is himself *the same, and his years shall*  
 have no end. The first of Beings uncaused by any other, exists in a way superior to, and more excellent than all others; all the periods of beginningless and endless eternity are connected in him; there never was any time when he was not, and he shall endure for ever.

As imperfect as our knowledge is of the essence and perfections of the Deity, we cannot but be convinc'd by our own reason, that immutability is imported in, or is a consequence from his eternity, as it has been explain'd, that is, from an eternal, uncaused, necessary existence. That which had neither beginning nor cause, which is the true meaning of absolute eternity, cannot be depriv'd of its being by any power, nor be liable to any change. Other things may continue to eternity, always depending on the pleasure of their Maker. For the power which created can annihilate their substance, as well as alter their forms. That only which has no precarious existence, and does not owe its being, nor any of its perfections to an external cause, has a fixed immutable permanence of being, in itself absolutely incapable of any alteration: and this being peculiar to the Divine nature, that it is self-original, and depends upon nothing,

thing, it can be subject to no power, nor ever  
be affected by any thing. SERM.  
VI.

The natural perfections of the Deity, his power, and knowledge, and wisdom, not depending even upon his own will, as they are derived from no other cause, but included in his Essence itself, must be, like it, invariable. It is impossible they should ever cease to be, or suffer any diminution, being the essential characters whereby he is what he is; so that they must be, as his existence, necessary, to everlasting as well as from everlasting, liable to no influence from without, incapable of any change within himself, impaired by no time, nor limited by any periods of eternal duration. The moral attributes indeed, such as Holiness, Goodness, Justice and Veracity, are of somewhat a different consideration, and our way of thinking concerning them does not lead us to the same notion of their immutability. We have a very clear and determinate idea of moral rectitude; but it carries in it free agency, and is in ourselves and other inferior moral agents, accompanied with a possibility of doing wrong. How then moral perfections should be essential to any being, always free in their exercise, depending on the will, and yet so necessary as to be absolutely immutable; this is hard

SERM. for us to conceive. At the same time, as

VI.

moral goodness is necessarily high in the esteem of the human mind, so that we cannot account any being absolutely perfect without it; and every property of the Divine nature, proceeding from no external cause, must belong to it in a manner which we cannot comprehend, different from the limited and derived qualities of all inferior beings; we must conclude that the moral perfections of the Supreme Being are, like his other attributes, essential, necessary and eternal, tho' the manner of their being so, is to us incomprehensible. And since this does not arise from any defect of power, knowledge or wisdom, but on the contrary, from the infinite fulness of all real perfection, the unchangeableness of the Divine moral attributes does not lessen, but heighten the glory: Which is plain from this consideration, that every one will acknowledge that the more mutable any good moral character or dispositions are, the less valuable; and the more steady any person is in goodness, the more excellent. It is therefore a very amiable representation which the scripture gives us of the Justice of God, that it is like *the great mountains* \* stedfast and unmoveable; of his truth, *that it endureth for ever* †; and of his goodness,

\* Psal. xxxvi. 6.

† Psal. cxvii. 2.

goodness, that it *endureth continually*\*; and with the *Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift cometh down, there is no variableness nor shadow of turning*†. SERM. VI.

But let us consider a little farther, how our minds may be assisted in forming conceptions, (which tho' weak and inadequate yet may be useful,) of the immutable Divine eternity, or of duration always passing, as it is applied to the Supreme Being, with whom there is no change. It has been already observ'd, and ought to be always remember'd, that the subject is above our comprehension. How is it to be imagin'd, that a finite understanding can form an adequate idea of that which is actually and positively infinite? That eternity is beyond the reach of our understandings, will still appear more plainly, when we consider how they come by the idea of duration itself, and proceed upon it. It takes its rise from the succession which we observe in our own thoughts; it is enlarg'd, and time is measured, that is distinguish'd into longer and shorter periods, by the regular successive motion of certain bodies, such as the sun and the moon; but imagination draws it out beyond all we know to have actually pass'd, or beyond all the measures convey'd to our knowledge by means of the senses

OR

\* Psal. liii. 1.

† Jam. i. 17.

SERM. or reflection, still with a conceived possibility

VI. of addition. So that by this method, we can

only attain to a negative idea of eternity, as a duration which is indeterminable, or to which no limits can be set; just as from circumscrib'd corporeal magnitude, we take our rise to the idea of infinite extension, which is negative, like the other; but our reason convinces us of something positive in both, which we call infinity.

Now the Divine eternity being thus incomprehensible, we must rest satisfied with a very imperfect knowledge of it. Some have represented it as excluding all manner of succession, which they apprehend to be inconsistent with the absolute perfection of the Supreme Being, to whom there can be no past and future, but all things must be ever present to him with whom there is no variableness. Besides, they imagine there cannot be an eternal successive duration, for the reasons mentioned before, such as that an infinite succession past seems to be inconceivable, and that this would be to suppose greater and lesser in infinity. Therefore they call eternity as attributed to God, a *standing point*, which comprehends all possible duration, and co-exists with time and all its changes, but does not pass, like it. But this seems to be utterly

ly



ly unintelligible. How can any man conceive a permanent instant, or which co-exists with a perpetually flowing duration? one might as well apprehend a mathematical point co-extended with a line, a surface and all dimensions. And for the reasoning used to support this notion, it really proves no more than the weakness of our understandings, which cannot form a positive adequate idea of duration without real or imagin'd limits, tho' we are sure there is an unchangeable existence, to which unlimited duration belongs.

It is certainly reasonable however, as the Deity's manner and condition of Being is infinitely more perfect than ours, to understand his duration with as little variety in it as possible, and as free from all the infirmities which cleave to our mutable nature. All things about us are in a perpetual flux; matter continually changing its form, and passing into different states and constitutions, by generation and corruption; our own bodies so continually alter their composition, that in a few years very little remains of the same matter; as to our souls, we know very little of their essence; it is consciousness only which gives us an idea of personal identity, but in the exercise of our rational powers we find a very great variation. Our thoughts change, so do our de-  
fires

SERM. fires and hopes, and all our other affections.

**VI.** With great difficulty and uncertainty, and often not without mistakes, we endeavour to recollect what is past, and we look forward with anxiety, to unknown hereafter. All these are marks of imperfection, and it does not appear that any finite being can be altogether free from them. But it is not so with the first Cause, the original, self-sufficient and unde-rived Fountain of Being, whose essence cannot be capable of any alteration, nor do his powers and perfections vary with the changes of time. His omnipotence suffers no diminution by any opposite force, no more than by a natural decay: The heavens were stretched out and the earth establish'd by the irresistible determination of his will, which the scripture elegantly calls his command, intimating that the greatest works, even creation itself, are easy to him; and this mighty strength remains in its full unimpair'd vigour, and whatever pleaseth him that he doth. His knowledge comprehends all things, past, present and future, not as if all existed at once, tho' they are at once in his view. There is a succession in the objects, but not in his understanding, which suffers no change; things past and to come are as clear to his All-comprehending mind as the present. There can be no such thing

thing in his perfect understanding as what we SERM.  
call remembrance, that is reviving former VI.

images or impreffions, which are obscur'd or forgotten by new ones succeeding in their place. For he sees through the whole compass of duration backwards, as well as to the utmost bounds of present being, and he perceives the most distant futurity with the same clearness; *known to him are all his works*, and all the works of his creatures, which shall be, as well as those which are. and *he sees the end from the beginning*.

There can therefore be no possible alteration of his purposes and measures, but his *counsels shall stand for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations*.

Whatever changes there may be in the state of things without, according to the limited and imperfect condition of their nature, there is no change in his knowledge and counsels.

*One day is with him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day* \* ; not as if he did

not see the real difference between these unequal durations, but they do not affect him, either in his designs or his felicity, as they do finite beings; for no unforeseen event can arrive, in the least to alter his condition or his designs.

The intire scheme of his administration was form'd from everlasting, and the whole extent of futurity was at once in his view, so that

\* 2 Pet. iii. 8.

nothing

SERM. nothing can possibly happen unexpected, no-

VI. thing new which may surprise him; no sudden  
emotion can arise in his mind, no passion, no painful desire, no uneasy hope, no anger, fear or sorrow, but he possesses an eternally uniform and undisturb'd tranquillity. The creation of worlds, and disposing them in beautiful order and harmony, the forming innumerable living intelligent beings, and communicating various pleasures to them, according to the several capacities he has given them; again, the convulsions of nature, wholly altering the form of some parts of the creation, together with the great revolutions which fall out in the state of some rational creatures, whereby they, originally made for good and for happiness, become evil and miserable;—all these things, and whatever other important changes arrive, which are amazing to limited minds, and must produce admiration with divers kinds of affections and feelings, yet pass under his eye, and under his direction, without producing any alteration in his counsels or his happiness. They were all perfectly foreseen, just as they come to pass, without the least variation in any one circumstance, and all wisely adjusted in his eternal decrees. All this is easily intelligible, and necessarily follows from the absolute perfection of the Divine nature,

nature, and it may be a consistent explication SERM.  
of that so much celebrated description of the VI.  
Divine eternity, that it is *interminabilis vitæ*,  
*tota simul et perfecta possessio*; but to make it  
literally a standing perpetual NOW, compre-  
hending all periods of duration, is what we  
can have no notion of.

I come now *Lastly*, to draw some practical  
inferences. The whole controversy concern-  
ing the Being and Perfections of God, is of  
the greatest importance, to the purposes of  
forming mens tempers and directing their  
practice, and it is so regarded by all parties.  
The *Atheists* are warm in their opposition,  
because they cannot help seeing what reverence  
and dutiful dispositions, (which they are averse  
to, imagining or pretending that it is a servile  
state of mind,) the Divine perfections demand,  
if once they are acknowledg'd; and the be-  
lievers in God find themselves oblig'd to con-  
tend with a hearty zeal for the respect due to  
his character. But there is no one attribute  
which appears more venerable than that of ab-  
solute independent Eternity. Tho' it is but  
little we know of it, yet that little fills the mind  
with the greatest awe, and raises an idea of  
magnificence, unparallel'd in the whole circle  
of being. We find ourselves possess'd of an  
existence which is confin'd within very nar-  
row



SERM. row limits, our remembrance is but of yesterday,

VI. day, our consciousness reaches only to a very short period. We see all things about us continually passing; beings like ourselves disappear after acting their part but a few years on this stage, and their places know them no more. We cannot avoid apprehending the same fate to ourselves, that we shall soon withdraw into darkness and make room for others; rather indeed, upon this superficial view of things, we are perfectly ignorant of what shall come after. What then? Has existence itself no stable foundation? Is there nothing in nature but a perpetual round of transitory being; nothing we can fix our thoughts upon that is permanent and undecaying, which holds together the whole series of successive existence, and establishes a connexion of past, present and future? This way of thinking spreads horror and confusion over the whole face of nature, disorder on the origin of all things, and darkness on their last result: Nothing looks great, nor so much as real; existence itself vanishes into a shadow, and consciousness into a dream, with an universal blank before and behind it. But when we see an eternal intelligence, self-existent and immutable, the same yesterday and to day and for ever, how is the prospect changed?

Every

Every thing appears in a fair and amiable S E R M.  
light; however variable the exterior face of VI.  
nature may be, there is a permanent wisdom  
in the Cause which directed the beginning of  
things, and establishes their continuance,  
which holds fast the foundations of existence  
and unites it to a central point: That gloomy  
spectre of eternal nothing flies away, or, which  
is no better, rather the same under empty in-  
significant names, eternal chance or blind un-  
designing necessity. This state of order, and  
intelligence at the head of it, is what a wise  
attentive mind could not but wish for, and  
rejoice in finding it true, as giving it a com-  
fortable enjoyment of its own existence, and  
a delightful idea of regularity and beauty in  
the appearance of the universe. But when  
considering the constitution of things, our re-  
moteft view either backward or forward ter-  
minates in non-entity, or in ignorance and  
confusion, the present state itself loses all its  
solidity and all its excellence, the highest per-  
fection of being sinks into emptiness and va-  
nity. Such is the dismal condition of the *A-*  
*theist's* mind; his existence is his all, and a  
poor insipid thing it is, scarce having any en-  
joyments above the brutal kinds, and its low  
enjoyments allay'd with suspicions and fears  
which the brutal kinds are not capable of: It


SERM. knows of no being without it to whom it

VI. owes itself and all the good which it possesses; and therefore nothing to warm it with gratitude, (that noble felicitating affection) nor to be the support of its confidence; nothing in the world appears worth the caring for, the world itself is stript of all its glory and beauty. The *Atheist* finds no wisdom to entertain his understanding with; that order, proportion and harmony, which are so entertaining to other minds, are lost to him, regarded no otherwise than as chimeras; he sees nothing without him that is excellent, feels nothing within his heart that is generous and manly. Benevolence itself decays, unsupported by any just sentiments; tho' its root is too deep fix'd by the wise unknown Author of his being, to be altogether extirpated, yet the more he views human nature in the false light of his mean principles, the less amiable it appears. How is humanity sunk in these unhappy creatures, and the dignity of our being, indeed of all being, lost to them, through their affected ignorance and perverseness? Their state surely is not to be envied, but extremely to be pitied; their boasted freedom, what is it but a freedom from the knowledge and the mental enjoyment of all that is wise, and good

good and great, which is the principal happiness of the human nature. SERM.  
VI.

2dly, In a special manner that one unchangeable intelligent, eternal fountain of existence and all perfection, must be transcendently glorious in our eyes. A mind that reflects on its commencement, conscious of present being and comparing it with former nothing, rejoices in its own existence, the foundation of all its acts and enjoyments; the same is the necessary foundation of all excellence without us. It appears therefore a perfection to be, and yet a greater perfection to continue in being, but an uniform immutable conscious existence, is the utmost conceivable perfection; it is impossible to imagine any thing beyond it, nay, the imagination cannot comprehend it. This is the character of the Deity, which raises him high in our esteem, and intitles him to that name, which *Moses* says, he gave himself, and claims as peculiarly belonging to him, I AM THAT I AM, importing that he exists in a peculiar manner unchangeably; not like other beings which might not have been at all, or might have been otherwise than they are, depending wholly on the will of their Maker, and may be hereafter quite different from what they are at present.

SERM. Again, God is to be ador'd by us, as being

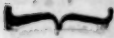
VI.  immutable, not only in his Essence, but in his purposes. Changes of thought and design are among the most important which befall us, and they are attended with a consciousness of our own infirmity. How little do we look in our own eyes, when we reflect on that imperfection of understanding, and other frailties, which make it necessary for us often to alter our resolutions and our conduct; and what a diminutive idea have we of other intelligent beings, whose fickle tempers vary as outward accidents do? Tho' at the same time it must be acknowledg'd the glory of imperfect creatures, when thro' weakness they have erred from the truth, and by temptations been led astray from the paths of righteousness, not to persist obstinately in their mistakes and evil courses, but to forsake them, and to change their sentiments and their conduct. For truth and right are immutable as God himself, and as he inviolably cleaves to them through the absolute perfection of *his nature*, so ought we return to them, renouncing the errors and faults into which we have fallen, through the imperfection of *ours*. But how glorious is it and excellent to be of one mind, and to preserve the same unvaried temper and  
tenor



tenor of conduct, from an absolute perfect-  
tion of knowledge, and an unalterable rec-  
titude of will? From hence arises an indis-  
pensable and perpetual obligation on us, and  
all intelligent creatures, of worship and ho-  
mage to the Deity. If the glory and per-  
fection of his nature can suffer no diminu-  
tion, and in consequence of that, the mea-  
sures of his government are through all ages  
the same, the foundations of our duty to  
him are unmoveable. Here is an essential  
difference between the true God of the uni-  
verse, and idols, fictitious Deities which ei-  
ther have no real being, but are only the  
creatures of deluded human imagination, or  
at least have no divinity, no dominion over  
the world, or authority over men: Upstart  
gods, whose honour, raised on no just founda-  
tion, shall quickly perish; but the God of  
the universe thus describes himself, *Isa. xliii.*  
*10. I am he, before me there was no God  
formed, neither shall there be any after me.*

3dly, The eternity of God ought to be  
considered in conjunction with all his other  
attributes, it is the character of every one of  
them. His power and wisdom, his righte-  
ousness, goodness and truth are eternal and  
unchangeable as his being; and by this con-  
sideration all our religious duties are greatly

SERM. enforced. He is the proper object of our

VI. fear, because his dominion reaches to the  
 utmost limits of our existence. A tempo-

rary power can only claim a temporary obedience, and indeed not an absolute obedience, even while it subsists; for as the relation between human governors and subjects may be dissolv'd, and the servant becomes free from his master (which will soon be the case in fact of all superiors and inferiors among men, whom death will put upon a level, tho' it does not extinguish their being;) so the expectation of that change diminishes the present respect which a short-liv'd authority claims. But the Ruler, whose power extends to all futurity, and who, as he lives and reigns for ever, has the disposal of our condition in ages at the remotest distance, as well as the present, is intitled to our unlimited subjection and perpetual fear. Our Saviour's direction is therefore very just, † *Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear, fear him who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.*

Again, the grounds of our hope and confidence in God are firm and stable. As the  
 Goodness

† Luke xii. 4, 5.

*shewn to be a peculiar Attribute of God.* 215

Goodness to which we owe our being, and SERM. VI.  
all the happiness we enjoy, is eternal, (God

loves his creatures *with an everlasting love,*)  
so, *because he is the Lord and changes not,*  
*they are not consumed.* He can provide against all future dangers as well as the present, and however the appearances of things may vary, they are none of them without his foresight, and the direction of his wise and powerful providence. Therefore the objections of men against the Divine administration, when things fall out otherwise than they expected, are vain and groundless, and their conclusion extremely rash, that his promises are not to be trusted. If scoffing infidels say, † *Where is the promise of his coming to judge the world,* and render recompences to men, for *since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were?* the answer in which his servants rest contented, still humbly confident in his mercy and faithfulness, is, *a thousand years are with the Lord as one day,* all times are equally in his power, and sooner or later he will fulfil all the reasonable and just desires of them that fear him.

† 2 Pet. iii.

## S E R M O N VII.

The Doctrine of God's Omnipresence explain'd and vindicated.

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Psal. cxxxix. 7, 8, 9, 10.

*Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there, if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there, if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.*

SERM. VII. **I**T is evident to any one who attentively considers the constitution of the human mind, that it was not made for a full comprehension of things and a thorough understanding of their natures, but that all the intellectual capacities and modes of perception with which it is indued, were intended by the wise contrivance of its Maker, to answer other particular purposes. Our sensations

tions do not at all let us into the knowledge SERM.  
of the essence of those material objects which VII.

produce them in us; indeed not directly and immediately into the knowledge of their existence itself. And tho' we have an inward consciousness of our own perceptions and volitions, our perceiving and self-determining powers, and of our own existence, yet what the intimate nature is of that conscious self, we do not understand. The Father of our spirits and of lights, *from whom every good gift cometh down*, has given us such knowledge as is sufficient, and was design'd for directing our practice, and for communicating such enjoyment as he intended for us; not for our comprehending fully the nature of any thing, which does not seem requisite to the ends of our being.

But least of all can we form any adequate notion of the supreme Being himself. Not only the absolute perfections of his nature cannot be thoroughly understood by us, but we have no immediate perception of them, as we have of other objects. We have distinct ideas of sensible qualities, such as the figure and magnitude of bodies, and a direct intuitive knowledge of our own rational faculties and operations; we have also very clear apprehensions of moral qualities, as of good-



SERM. nefs, justice and gratitude. But of the divine,

VII. peculiar and incommunicable attributes, necessary existence, eternity and immensity, we have not, nor are capable of forming any positive idea. It seems reasonable enough to believe that the human mind might have been form'd otherwise than it is, and not improbable that it may have capacities and ways of perceiving in another state of existence, different from those it now has, even such as shall have God and his perfections for their immediate object. I do not say, that it is possible for a finite understanding to comprehend infinity; but as we have now an intuitive knowledge of the qualities and existence of some objects, the essences of which are hid from us, it is not at all inconceivable, that we might have had, and may hereafter have a direct intuition of the Divine glorious Being and Attributes, tho' *his* Essence and *their* utmost extent will still be past finding out. Let it be observ'd, that many of our original ideas, the materials of our knowledge, are not to be accounted for, and the reasons of them explained from the nature of things; but we must resolve them into an arbitrary constitution of the Author of our being. No man can tell, (I mean give a reason from a prior knowledge of their nature and ours,) why

why material objects raise the sensations in SERM.  
us which we find in fact they do raise, and **VII.**


which is not in our power to hinder, or in the least to alter. Who then can take upon him to say we could not possibly have had, or that we may not in another state actually have, very different perceptions from the present; and particularly, that the absolutely perfect Being and his Attributes, may not be the immediate object of our perception? This is what *St. Paul* means by the figurative expression of seeing God, and Divine things, *face to face, not darkly and through a glass\** as we do now, which he represents as the high attainment of perfected spirits: that is, their knowledge shall be as much superior to the present in clearness, and in its power of exciting good affections, and giving pleasure to the mind, as an intimate acquaintance with, and immediate vision of the persons and other objects we now know, is to faint images and obscure distant representations.

At present, our knowledge of the Deity is very dark and imperfect, collected from his works and the manifestations he has made of himself, by reasoning; a more difficult and unaffecting way than that of direct intuition. By reflecting on ourselves, on the constitution of our own nature with its various powers,

ten-

\* 1 Cor. xiii. 12,

SERM. tendencies, affections and operations, and by

VII.  considering external objects, which we perceive by our senses, with their relations and dependencies, we are led to a persuasion of his Being, power, wisdom and goodness. 'Tis true, by this method of inquiry, and exercise of our understandings, we are convinc'd, not only of the Divine existence and perfections, but that God is intimately present with us and all beings in the universe, continually *working on every side*; yet it is only by the means of sensible effects, which are the direct objects of our perceiving powers, we attain to this conviction. The Divine nature and Attributes themselves, the inward principle of his various operations, *no man hath seen at any time nor can see*: Not only he does not discern by his external senses, but he has not such a clear, immediate perception of them, as of other things which are neither seen, nor heard, nor felt, nor have no relation to body nor any of its properties, such as our own rational faculties and affections, and moral qualities. The obscurity and imperfection of this kind of knowledge which we have of God is elegantly describ'd in the book of *Job*, \* *Behold, I go forward but he is not there, (visible) and backward but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot be-*

*hold*

\* Chap. xxiii. ver. 8, 9.

*bold him; he hideth himself on the right hand* S E R M.  
*that I cannot see him.* Hence it follows, and VII.  
 we find it so in experience, that the perfec-  
 tions of God which are the most clearly ma-  
 nifested, and immediately exercis'd in his  
 works, are the best understood by us. We  
 have much more distinct apprehensions of  
 power, and wisdom, and goodness, than of  
 those characters of the Divine nature which  
 are, in no degree, communicable to any de-  
 pendent being, its self-existence and infinity.  
 The *latter* are not, nor can possibly be repre-  
 sented by any image, nor is the notion of  
 them conveyed by any discernible effect; the  
*other* have produc'd a resemblance of them-  
 selves in inferior agents, and the marks of  
 them are engraven on all the Divine opera-  
 tions. It is impossible that the condition of  
 a creature should lead us into the notion, as  
 containing in itself any image of uncaused ex-  
 istence; that a temporary being should give us  
 an idea of duration without beginning; or that  
 a body circumscrib'd within certain limits,  
 tho' by the position of its parts and its situa-  
 tion with respect to other bodies, we get our  
 first notion of distance and place; that, I say,  
 it should give us a clear perception of im-  
 mensity. As these are the attributes which it  
 is hardest for us to conceive, we shall still  
 think

SERM. think and speak of them the most clearly and  
VII. usefully, when, as far as that can be done,  
we consider them with relation to the works  
of God, which are the means whereby we attain to any knowledge of him. Thus, I think, particularly, we have a much better notion of the Divine omnipresence, and more applicable to practical purposes, by considering it as filling the whole universe, or the whole of created actual existence, not confin'd to any part of it;—we have a better notion of his universal presence in this view, because we consider him as continually working in all places, continually exerting his active perfections, his power, wisdom and goodness, than by applying our thoughts to the abstract speculation of absolute immensity, or existing in the whole of extramundane boundless space.

But tho' the manner of God's existence before the world was made, and of his being in infinite space beyond its limits now that it does subsist, surpasses our understanding, we cannot help being convinc'd that he does so exist. We have a clear enough idea of space not fill'd with matter, indeed demonstrative evidence, that not only there must be an absolute vacuity within the bounds of the corporeal system, but without it; for the greatest corporeal magnitude must be terminated.



Nay, we cannot remove out of our minds the SERM.  
idea of immensity, that is, of infinite exten- VII.

sion or space, no more than of eternal duration, tho' we are far from being able to comprehend it. Our senses convey to us the notion of distance: we easily imagine a greater distance than can be perceiv'd by them; but the imagination endeavouring to grasp its utmost extent, presently loses itself in an object too large for its capacity, and all the length it can proceed is only to this negative conclusion, that no limits can be set to space. Some have apprehended the space which is beyond the world, to be nothing real; they call it imaginary; that it is no more than a mere capacity of being; and, if infinity is to be attributed to it, 'tis but a potential infinity. But others think, that since there are certain limits to the material world, there must be measurable distance on its utmost surface, and its parts distinguish'd in their situation, as well as within the system; and those distances on the outside, having, like others, equality and different proportions, (which cannot be said of absolute nothing,) that therefore space is something real, consisting of truly different tho' inseparable parts; and that immense space is more than a bare possibility, tho' we cannot form a positive idea of it. But whatever it is,  
and

SERM. and the manner of God's existence in it, we  
VII. cannot avoid attributing immensity to him.

The ideas of uncaused and unlimited existence seem to be connected together; and he who comprehends all things, must be without, as well as within them, his essence circumscrib'd by no bounds. Still however, as was observ'd before, what we are sure of and more clearly understand, is, that the power and wisdom which stretched out the heavens and established the earth, are intimately near to them and all their parts: Which notion of the omnipresence of God, that he fills the whole universe, continually preserving and governing it, as it is the most intelligible, so it is the most useful, tending to excite in our minds the most becoming affections towards the Supreme Being. This therefore I shall principally insist on in the following discourse; that as the scripture speaks, *God fills heaven and earth*, not limited in his being and operations to one region of the universe, he possesseth the whole as the sovereign disposing Cause, and supreme Ruler. Inthron'd in heaven where the highest orders of created beings dwell, and pay him their homage, he exercises his dominion in all places at once, not mediately by the delegated power of others, who in his absence rule under him, but by his own  
immediate

immediate presence, powerfully preserving SERM.  
and wisely superintending all things. This I VII.  
will endeavour to prove and to explain, and  
then make some practical reflections upon it.

Since we have sufficient evidence of wisdom and design in the formation and government of the world, and since this appears in every work of nature which we have any knowledge of, we have reason also to conclude the same concerning those which are least known to us. If the motions of the sun and moon, and all the phænomena of the earth, not only the animal life, but even plants and inanimate things; if they all manifest the counsel and power of the one universal Cause, who can doubt but the same active intelligence rules in distant worlds, and systems beyond ours, if there are any such, even to the utmost bounds of existence? Hence we infer the omnipresence of God in the sense we are now considering it, from the very arguments by which we prove his being. For since that active intelligence to which all things are to be attributed as their Cause, is seated in a Mind, that Mind must necessarily be every where in heaven and earth, because it must be wherever it perceives and operates.

Again, it is to be observ'd, that the world is not a work, which the Author having put

SERM. the last hand to it, and settled it in its finish'd

VII. form, can subsist by itself without any care or interposition of his; like the productions of human art, which receive no more from the artist than the mere outward form, and the mutual relation of their gross parts, which could as well have stood by themselves in another form if his hand had never touch'd them. The Divine operations enter deeper into the constitutions of things, which must be upheld and directed to their various uses, by the continued influence of the same power which first gave them being. The gravitation of bodies is an example of this kind which I mention'd before, not to be accounted for by any powers originally given to matter, whereby it can, if left to itself, produce such an appearance, but it requires the constant impulse of an external agent to affect it. And being so necessary as it is to the corporeal system, to its form and continued order, and to its answering the purposes it was made for, shews plainly the presence of an intelligent activity in all parts of it, powerfully preserving and governing them. What therefore we commonly call the laws of nature, whereby the inanimate system is ruled, is really no more than a constant series of uniform Divine operations upon matter, whereby its parts co-

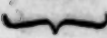
here in their regular forms, and answer their ends. SERM.  
VII.

But the other particular and very various productions of nature, which cannot be explain'd by any general mechanical laws, still more clearly shew the presence of God with all his works. The formation of plants and of animals; the curious texture of their parts; the disposing of them in the several places which are the most convenient for their nourishment and their special uses; the preservation of their several kinds unmix'd; the propagation of them in an establish'd regular method;—These things constantly falling out, not according to any general laws impress'd on matter and motion, but by the particular direction of a plastic power, evidently prove continued design in every one of them, descending to the most minute. For it is not merely the first model of a vegetable, as a pattern for all the rest of the kind, and the formation of the first individual sensitive life of every species, that shews the skill and power of the maker. They could never have been propagated of themselves; and every new production requires the exertion of the same power, and the direction of the same wisdom.

The human life in the whole of its constitution, and especially its nobler powers, have



SERM. a constant necessary dependence on the intel-

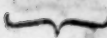
VII.  ligence from whence they are deriv'd. It has been already observ'd, that the ideas of sensation, which we find in our minds necessarily and independantly of our own choice, on the occasion of certain objects, do not arise from the nature of things, nor can we account for them from any knowledge we have, either of the objects, or the powers of our own minds. They must therefore be resolv'd into the free constitution of our intelligent Maker; which seems not merely to signify his general will, establishing a connexion between objects and our sensations, but rather is to be understood as his continued operation, since the exertion of some power is necessary to produce new perceptions, and there appears no other agent; for we are conscious that our minds, in receiving these ideas, are as passive as the objects which are the occasion of them. The same judgment, I think, is to be made concerning our natural instincts; the mere being, and the first motions of which are, properly speaking, neither virtuous nor morally evil, since they are not our own works: (for experience teaches us that they prevent any thought, deliberation or design of others, and do not depend on our will;) But as they are of great use to the purposes of our nature, tending, all of them, either

ther to public or private good, I see no rea-  
son why they may not be attributed to the

SERM.  
VII.

operation of that great intelligent Cause, in whom *we live and move and have our being*. And for those powers of human nature which are the most strictly and properly active; (tho' we are inwardly conscious of freedom in the exercise of them, and of merit and demerit in the actions proceeding from them, yet) that freedom must be infinitely different from self-original and uncaused liberty. For our self-determining activity, being derived and dependent, known by experience to be capable of increase and diminution, and very much directed and influenc'd by things without us, not in our own power nor within the reach of our understandings, needs the continual supporting influence of the first Cause, *who worketh in men both to will and to do*. In short, if we judge by what we see in things about us, and find in ourselves, we cannot conceive that any creature is, or can be, plac'd in a state of independence on its author, for its preservation, and for its exerting powers of any kind; but that he is, and must be intimately near to all his works, upholding them by his power, and conducting them by his wisdom; thus manifesting his eternal Godhead. Having thus endeavour'd to prove the

SERM. omnipresence of God, in that sense which is

VII.  to us the most important and the most useful, that is, not the absolute immensity of his nature, of which our notions must be very obscure and inadequate, but his being at once in all parts of the universe, and intimately near to all his creatures; let us in the next place.

2dly, Endeavour to form the most clear and distinct conceptions of it, we can. Since we have the ideas of extension, and of place, by the means of sensible objects, the primary notion of presence is that which belongs to them, and it is such as excludes all others of the same kind, I mean all solid substance. For it is the property of every particle of matter to fill a certain part of space, so as no other can possibly be in it, at the same time. But there are other beings of which we have different conceptions; namely, of their activity and intelligence, not at all including extension and solidity: Yet these beings we conceive to be present, or in place, not indeed after the manner of bodies, as impenetrably filling certain parts of space, but by the exertion of their powers. We know by consciousness the existence of our own spirits; and we know by their operations, that they are in our own bodies so as they are not in others. The same individual percipient and active principle with-

in

in us, extends the exercise of its perceptive and active faculties to all the parts of the system which it animates, and to that it is confin'd. Our manner of perceiving objects *without* and *within* that which we call ourselves, is exceedingly different: Upon its own body the mind acts immediately, and only by the intervention of its members can act upon other bodies. In our bodies therefore our souls are peculiarly present. But it is easy to apprehend that other spirits may have a larger sphere of perception, and a wider command of matter; at the same time a higher perfection in both, that is, they may have a more complete knowledge of the systems they inhabit, and a more absolute dominion over them. For as to us, it is certain that we do not thoroughly understand even our own constitution, and its œconomy is not put intirely in our own power; (which may not be the case of other intelligent beings,) our perceptions in it, and government of it, being both of a limited nature, and given to us only for particular ends.

From this we may take our rise to a notion of the Divine omnipresence, in the sense in which I am now considering it; I mean, we may conceive of it in this manner, that the Deity has a comprehensive knowledge of the

SERM. whole universe and every part of it, and

VII. that he exercises an absolute uncontrouled power over all. If any one will say this is hard to be understood; how can one mind comprehend so vast a variety, or be capable of so extensive a government? I own that *such knowledge is too high for us, we cannot attain to it*, but there is no inconsistency in supposing it. Let us first try to explain, if we can, how our minds perceive at once, the different impressions made on distant parts of our bodies, and move their members by a mere determination of the will. And if this be too difficult for our understandings, tho' there is no fact we know more certainly, what pretence is there for alledging, because the manner is incomprehensible, that the Deity, supposed and proved to be an infinitely more perfect spirit, cannot see through, and govern the whole world, his own workmanship? Perhaps to an intelligent being, confin'd to a very small portion of matter, with senses scarcely capacious enough to take in the dimensions of a body so large as one of ours, (which is no impossible supposition,) it might appear wonderful, almost incredible, that a mind should be able to govern so vast and ponderous a machine, and perceive in all its parts. Nor would it, on the other hand, be extravagant for us to imagine that



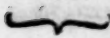
that a mind vastly more capacious than any of S E R M.  
ours, tho' far from absolute perfection, might VII.

animate, (and in a more perfect manner,) a corporeal system to which this little human tabernacle is but a point in comparison. And will any one then venture to say, 'tis impossible that the most perfect mind should perceive and operate through the whole solar system, nay, and whatever systems there are beyond it; when we have so clear evidences of his wisdom and power in all parts of the universe, which we have any knowledge of, the most minute, as well as the greatest? He must have very little consider'd the nature of spirits, so much as may be known of it, and the very different degrees of their perfection which even fall under our own observation, who will call it an absurdity to suppose that the spirit, which is the fountain of Being and understanding, comprehends all his own works and rules over them, tho' it is ridiculous to imagine we should know the manner of it, for that were to suppose our capacity equal to his.

I do not intend by this to represent God as the Soul of the world, which is a very low and unworthy notion of the Deity. He had the same immutable Being, Power and Wisdom before it was made, and is not now

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SERM. confin'd to it, though the manner of his exist-

**VII.**  ence in immense space, is what we have no idea of; and to suppose that his intelligence and operations have such a dependence on external created objects, as ours have upon bodily organs, and that he is so affected with the motions in the universe and its changes, as we are by the impressions made on our bodies by external objects, and the motions thereby caused within them;—to suppose this, I say, were an evident absurdity. I only propose by this low and imperfect image, to assist our weak understandings in forming an idea of his intimate presence with, and universal care over all things in the world, preserving it and wisely superintending its affairs; that as in us, there is one individual conscious self, that sees, and hears, and feels, and determines for the whole body, so in the universe there is one conscious intelligent Nature, which pervades the intire system; at once perceiving in every place, and presiding over all, yet in an infinitely more perfect manner, and free from those infirmities which attend our constitution. But it is especially to be observ'd, (and indeed the example I have made use of for illustrating this subject, helps to guard us against so gross an error,) that we must not conceive of the Divine presence,

sence, after the manner of corporeal magnitude, which being essentially divisible, cannot be all in one place, but its different parts take up different spaces, and its operation, (if it can be said to operate at all,) can only be by the successive presence of its parts in motion. Whereas the Omnipresence of the Divine Spirit, is only apprehended by the exercise of his power and understanding, (which does not include the ideas of extension or successive motion,) in all parts of the world; his intelligence and activity are confin'd to no place, and no where excluded. To speak of the Immensity of God as if it were a single point co-extended with infinite space, is the same absurdity as describing his eternity by an instant which co-exists with all duration. Such unintelligible subtleties, whereby the doctrines of religion are pretended to be explain'd, tend to confound mens understandings, and bring religion itself into contempt. What appears easily conceivable on this subject, (because our own consciousness furnishes us with some resemblance of it in ourselves,) is, that the same simple being may exert its perceptive and active faculties, at the same time, in different parts of space. And if this can admit of no difficulty, because we have an example of it in our own minds, which perceive and operate  
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**SERM.** in all parts of the body, then to compleat the  
**VII.** idea of Omnipresence, we need only enlarge  
our notion of that space which is the sphere  
of active intelligence, to the whole extent of  
the universe; and I think we cannot avoid ap-  
prehending that God is, wherever he exer-  
cises his power and understanding, tho' the  
manner of his presence is to us, incomprehen-  
sible.

One false imagination ought carefully to be  
avoided, which may be apt to arise in our  
minds, from our method of forming the no-  
tion of the Divine Omnipresence; namely, that  
the multiplicity of objects which engage the  
attention of the Supreme Understanding, may  
embarrass it. Supposing God to be every  
where, intimately near to all beings in the  
universe, as our souls are to our bodies; and  
since all things in the world are not equally  
considerable and worthy of care, it may seem  
more respectful to the greatest of beings, and  
a conception more suitable to his dignity, to  
imagine that his immediate inspection is em-  
ploy'd about matters of the highest impor-  
tance, leaving easier affairs to inferior agents;  
as the most eminent persons on earth who fill  
exalted stations, do not descend to minute  
things which would be thought beneath them,  
attending only business of greater moment.

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This mistake is occasion'd by our being accustomed so much to think of the narrow human capacity, which not being able to take in a great variety of objects at once, finds itself obliged to make choice of the more important and necessary for its attention, and it is certainly wisdom to do so: But it is a wisdom which at the same time implies weakness. No one can doubt of its being a higher perfection to comprehend a great multitude of things, so as to bestow the necessary care upon them, without neglecting any; and it is the highest perfection of all, appropriated to the self-existent unlimited Being, the first Cause, to comprehend the whole universe at once, disposing wisely of every, even the least thing in it; which being sufficiently evinc'd by strong arguments, it would be very unreasonable in us to doubt of it, merely because it so vastly transcends our capacity. The several kinds of finite intelligent beings in the world have their limited spheres of perception and activity: There is a determin'd extent to which they can reach and no farther; a certain number of objects fall under their observation, and their perceptions of those objects and their operations upon them, are of very different kinds. The lower sort of understandings can have no notion of the manner of perception,  
and



SERM. and the powers which belong to superior intelligent beings; no more than an animal wanting any of the external senses, can have of the ideas which are convey'd by that sense. Surely then it should not seem strange to us that these various degrees of limited intelligent perfection, deriv'd from the All-perfect Mind, fall infinitely short of its own capacity, which at once comprehends all its own works, and governs them without perplexity or confusion.

VII. It would be extremely weak to imagine that the difference we make by our senses, either external or internal, between places as pure and impure, should at all affect the Supreme Being. For what we call uncleanness, not moral but natural, is only relative, depending wholly on the frame of our bodily organs which determine sensible qualities, that is, the images or representations made on our minds from the exterior surface of corporeal objects. An intelligent being therefore, with organs otherwise made, or without any material organs at all, would not receive the same impressions from the bodies called impure, which we do, nor be affected with their nearness as we are. Especially that pure Spirit, who perceives not, as man does, the external appearances of things only, but their inmost essences, cannot receive offence or suffer uneasiness,

easiness like what we feel, from that which SERM.  
is called defilement, which is a merely sensible VII.  
idea. And as to *moral turpitude*, tho' we

are made with an abhorrence of it, producing strong emotions and painful sensations in our minds, shame, sorrow and resentment, which is a wise part of the human constitution, being a design'd preservative against the greatest evil and unhappiness; yet we ought not to imagine that the Deity is affected with it in the same manner as we are. He sees moral evil, and is present where it is committed, without any participation in it; and disapproves without being made uneasy by it. He preserves his creatures, moral agents as well as others, and exercises that care over them which their dependent natures severally require; supporting their active powers, which is necessary to their exertion, even when they are acting irregularly, yet without any concurrence in the irregularity, or any preturbation arising from it: Which tho' it be a manner of presence and of acting, that we are not capable of, by the limited condition of our nature, and the special laws of our constitution, yet is it not difficult to conceive concerning the Supreme Being, if we consider his absolute perfection and blessedness, far above the possibility of being misled into any error, or touch'd with

SERM. with any painful passion. Having thus endeavoured to prove and to explain the doctrine of  
 VII. God's Omnipresence, I come now in the

3<sup>d</sup> place, To draw some useful inferences from it. It is not to be consider'd as a point of mere speculation, but may be applied to very important practical purposes; and ought to have a great influence on the temper of our minds, and our whole behaviour. The *Psalmist* describes it very affectionately in the text, and pursues his devout meditation on the same subject, through the whole *Psalm*; considering it especially as a motive to sincerity, and a strict attention to every part of his conduct, not merely that which is open to the view of the world, but chiefly his most secret actions, and the dispositions and purposes of his heart. How strongly must this consideration affect an attentive mind; “ Had I the command of  
 “ universal nature, so that I could transport  
 “ myself whither I pleas'd for a safe retreat,  
 “ there is no possibility of avoiding the presence of God. If I mount up to the utmost  
 “ extremities of this material world, even to  
 “ the surface that parts it from the immense  
 “ void, I should find myself there within the  
 “ verge of his sovereign dominion. If I descend to the darkness which is hid from all  
 “ living, there I should be naked before him,  
 “ there

“ there is no obscurity impenetrable to his SERM.  
“ All-searching eye, the wings of the morn- VII.  
“ ing are not swift enough to carry me from  
“ his pursuing hand, and the shadows of  
“ night are as open to his view as the bright-  
“ est sunshine. But where the Deity is, there  
“ is the Power and the Understanding which  
“ made the heavens and the earth, and form'd  
“ the spirit of man within him.” This certainly  
ought, and when it is seriously believed and  
deliberately attended to, it will strike our minds  
with the most profound reverence, which is  
not a weak and foolish dread of we don't know  
what, but a dutiful affection, very natural to  
the human mind, arising from a full and rational  
persuasion of a real awful presence.

Before men of superior power, and reputation for wisdom, we are struck with awe, and solicitous to behave in such a manner as to obtain their approbation. But these are only faint images of greatness: That glorious Being who is the original Fountain of all power and wisdom, is infinitely more to be feared; and it must be of infinitely greater importance to approve ourselves to him, requiring at the same time much greater vigilance and application of mind, because his presence reaches to our inmost essence, and he knows our secret thoughts. The Scripture therefore very instructively

VOL. I. Q

SERM. structively describes the whole of religion by  
 VII. that comprehensive expression, *walking before*  
*God*; which signifies a constant serious sense of  
 the Divine Presence upon our minds, producing a circumspect care to please him in all things. It is not merely an outward decorum in our conduct that the presence of the invisible God teaches us; nor only a watchful care of our behaviour in the solemnities of devotion. The influence of this great article of religion extends to our most hidden retirements, and it requires very strict attention to the springs and motions of deliberate action in all the affairs of human life, as being all equally *naked and opened unto the eyes of him, with whom we have to do, as our Ruler and our Judge.*

And if there is no darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves, if their *secret sins are set in the light of God's countenance*; how confounding must this consideration be to the sinners, whose consciences witness against them that they have wilfully and habitually indulg'd themselves in wickedness? And if they are thoroughly convinc'd that their transgressions have been committed in the sight of that God, *who is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity* with approbation, what stronger motive can there be to their betaking themselves



to his mercy by a speedy repentance? On the other hand, it yields mighty consolation to sincerely good men, that a desire of approving themselves to God rules in their hearts, and by it they have form'd their conduct. The rash censures and erroneous judgments of fallible men concerning their actions, do not greatly disturb their minds, since they are conscious to themselves, of having endeavour'd by an uniform integrity of heart and life, to obtain the approbation of an unerring Judge.

2dly, This is a sure foundation of hope and confidence to good men in all the vicissitudes of time, and in all the dangers and distresses which befall them: For the presence of God is a presence of Power, against which no force can prevail, and of Wisdom which no device can over-reach. The most formidable appearances are frequently controul'd, and the most threatening tendencies over-rul'd by Divine Providence to happy issues, for the defenceless who trust in God, and *cast their burdens on him.* \* *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea: Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.* It is true,

Q 2

the

\* Psal. xli. 1, 2, 3.

SERM. the care of Providence is to us invisible, and  
 VII. we cannot possibly penetrate into the methods  
 of its interposition, nor into its designs: Yet it  
 must be a perpetual source of comfort to good  
 minds, that *the eyes of God run to and fro*  
*throughout the earth, to shew himself strong in*  
*behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards*  
*him\**. He does not indeed give them a per-  
 fect security against troubles, to which the  
 condition of man is always liable in this life,  
 and we have none of us reason to expect an  
 exemption from them. But it ought to give  
 us perfect contentment, and we should ac-  
 quiesce in it with pleasure, that God is ever  
 near to us, that his wisdom governs the world,  
 and directs the whole series of events in it.

3dly, If God is every where present, he is  
 every where to be worshipped; his Perfections,  
 not confin'd to any place, are to be acknow-  
 ledg'd and ador'd by his reasonable creatures  
 in all places. To imagine that the Deity  
 dwells in *Temples made with hands*, as if his  
 presence were appropriated to them, is a very  
 unworthy notion. Indeed as public worship  
 is reasonable, that is, that men professing to  
 believe in God should join together in calling  
 upon his name; it follows, that proper places  
 should be provided for it. But that is only for  
 the

\* Chron. xvi. 2.

the conveniency of the worshippers; not as if SERM.  
 God were more accessible, or better dispos'd VII.  
 to hear prayers and accept services, in one  
 place than another. There may be, 'tis true,  
 peculiar manifestations of the Divine power  
 and glory in some parts of the creation and  
 not in others. The heavens are therefore call-  
 ed the throne of God, and his habitation,  
 because there the splendor of his Majesty and  
 his high Perfections shine most illustriously,  
 in the view of those creatures which are the  
 best qualified to discern it; but his Essence,  
 infinitely perfect in wisdom and power, is  
 equally present in all places. In like manner,  
 during the *Jewish* policy, some places were  
 held more sacred than others; as the taber-  
 nacle which *Moses* made in the wilderness, and  
*Solomon's* temple, because God was pleas'd,  
 for special reasons, to appropriate to them the  
 external service he then appointed to the *Is-*  
*raelites*, and to distinguish them by visible ex-  
 traordinary tokens, called his *Presence*. But  
 these special reasons have long ago ceased; and  
 now, according to the more pure and spiritual  
 form of religion which our Saviour has insti-  
 tuted, wherever men *worship in spirit and*  
*truth*, wherever they call on God out of a  
 pure heart, *fearing him and working righteous-*  
*ness*, they are accepted. Nay, excepting the  
Q 3 reason

SERM. reason already mention'd, the conveniency of

VII. numerous assemblies, which only relates to  
*public* worship; excepting this, I say, to make  
 a choice of places for devotion, as imagining  
 greater sanctity in some than others, is at best  
 but silly superstition, if it is not rather to be  
 imputed, as in some cases certainly it is, to a  
 vain hypocritical pretence of zeal, which the  
 God of truth never approves. Our Saviour  
 therefore enjoins his disciples, that they may  
 have the clearer and more satisfying evidences  
 of sincerity in their own minds, to choose the  
 greatest secrecy for their private worship, to  
*retire into their closets, and pray to their hea-*  
*venly Father, who sees in secret,* and is pleas'd  
 with that undissembled piety which honours  
 him as an Omnipresent God.

*Lastly,* This doctrine shews the absurdity  
 of worshipping idols. Gods that are acknow-  
 ledged not to be *every* where, are not worthy  
 of religious respect *any* where. In reality,  
 and *by nature they are no gods* \*, as St. Paul  
 says very justly concerning them. They are *ly-*  
*ing vanities*, so the Scripture often calls them,  
 their divinity, the mere fiction of the human  
 imagination. But by the confession of their  
 worshippers, they have only a limited pre-  
 sence, power and understanding, gods only of  
 par-

\* Gal. iv. 8.

particular countries, or perhaps only of particular places in them, *gods of the hills and not of the vallies*. And how they came by their several situations, and had their distinct provinces assign'd them, their votaries cannot pretend to tell; which one would think, should be an insuperable difficulty attending the very foundations of their superstition. Who can give a reason for *Chemesh* his being the god of the *Moabites*, and why *Milcom* should exercise his godship over the children of *Ammon*? And if the titles of the topical Deities cannot be made out, the honours paid to them may be misplac'd, and men be serving the wrong god. But it is needless to insist on particular arguments, against a devotion which, in the whole of it, is so apparently irrational. That supreme eternal Being who has manifested, and does still manifest his power and intelligence, and thereby his essential presence every where, is alone worthy to receive the praises, the religious homage and adoration, of all intelligent creatures in heaven and earth, and is ever nigh to all that call upon him in truth.



# SERMON VIII.

God's Almighty Power, by what Acts manifested, and in what Sense to be understood.

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Gen. xvii. 1.

*The Lord appeared unto Abraham and said unto him, I am God Almighty.*

SERM. VIII. **A**S the idea of power is one of the most familiar to our minds, it arises from a multitude of occasions, from an attention to our own activity, and the many changes we see in material objects, which lead us to the consideration of a cause or causes, that is, power producing them; so Omnipotence is one of the first perfections which reason has taught men to ascribe to the Supreme Being. We cannot avoid observing a great diversity of operations and effects; and consequently a great difference in the degrees of power: But the highest measure of this perfection must belong to the first universal Cause,

Cause, whose characters have in the preceding SERM. discourses, been prov'd; and indeed by all who VIII. believe his existence, are acknowledg'd to be intelligence and activity. If there is one immense, necessarily existing and eternal Spirit, the designing original Author of all appearances and of all powers distinct from his own, in the universe, his power must be the greatest of all, nay, the greatest and most absolute that can be. For it must be sufficient for its own productions, superior to all which are derived from it; and to suppose the possibility of a greater, is to suppose that a superior power may proceed from an inferior and insufficient cause, or from nothing. Accordingly, all of mankind who acknowledg'd the one supreme eternal Deity, have constantly agreed in attributing to him the character which the *God of Abraham* claims for himself, that he is *Almighty*: However they might differ in their notions concerning his other perfections, here they are unanimous. The idea of power always accompanies that of Divinity. The prophet *Isaiab* therefore having asserted the supremacy of the God of *Israel*, which is prov'd by his wonderful works, reproaches the heathen idols with weakness. He calls upon them to shew their Godhead by the operations of their power, either *in doing good or evil* †; for an

† *Isaiab* xli. 23.

SERM. impotent God is an absurdity, in the opinion

VIII. of every man. But if there be one independent God for everlasting, on whom all things depend, there appears no colourable pretence for denying that he is All-powerful. And as this is among the first principles universally receiv'd in speculation; so it has a most direct and immediate influence to the purposes of religion. For tho' all the Divine perfections concur in exciting religious dispositions; and taken together, they form that amiable character, which is the object of our devout affections; yet the consideration of Almighty power, in a particular manner strikes the mind with awe, and produces that fear which is a great security of our obedience. I shall therefore in this discourse endeavour to explain the attribute of Omnipotence, which by the clearest evidence of reason, we are convinc'd, belongs to God. And I will, *First*, shew wherein it consists, and by what works it is manifested. *Secondly*, In what sense and with what limitation it is to be understood.

*First*, Let us consider *wherein the Omnipotence of God consists, and by what works it is manifested*. The principle itself, the Almighty Power of the Deity, by which can be meant nothing else but his infinitely active Nature, is too high for us to understand. All the idea

we can have of it is by its operations, which S E R M.  
is inadequate, but it represents the object to our VIII.

minds as being very great; since the effects by which we form it, even those of them which fall within our own particular knowledge, are so many and so wonderful. All things that are in the universe, the first Cause himself only excepted, are his works, and all power is derived from him. Now, if the effects vastly transcend the capacity of the human mind, how can it by searching find out the Cause? If we cannot reach to the utmost limits of created nature, nor comprehend the productions of Divine Power, how shall we comprehend the Power itself, which must be suppos'd to be far superior to them? What pretence can there be for denying or doubting that he can do whatever pleaseth him, *who made the heavens and all the hosts of them, the earth and all things that are therein, the sea and all that therein is, and who preserveth them all* †? But we need not puzzle our thoughts by endeavouring to imagine the utmost extent of possibility, when we begin to form an idea of Divine Power; let us consider it as manifested in actual existence, for that will furnish us with instances to which we shall find our understandings unequal.

The giving being to things that were not, is an exercise of Power which surpasses our

† Nehemiah ix, 6.

SERM. comprehension, because it is unparallel'd in

VIII. other causes, and far beyond any activity that  
 we are conscious of in ourselves, or can by means of our senses discern in others, which requires pre-existent materials to work upon. A power to change the exterior and visible forms of matter is what we can easily comprehend, for *that* we find ourselves able to do in many instances; and the more difficult operations of nature in changing the inward frame of things, whereby the same substance passes into a variety of very different appearances. For example, that which is now earth and water having undergone several preparatory alterations, becomes corn and other vegetables; afterwards it is converted into animal juices; from whence some of it perspires in small particles and mixes with the air, the rest adheres to the solid parts of the animal body, or is discharged in various forms: These, I say, and such like operations, however it may exceed our skill to imitate, or even to comprehend them fully, yet are familiar to us, being daily exemplified before our eyes in natural generation and corruption. But to bring something out of nothing, or cause that to exist which had no existence before in any form, requires a Power so much superior to ours, and is so unlike any agency which falls within



within our observation and experience, that SERM.  
no materials of our knowledge can furnish us VIII.  
with any notion of it : and this is an operation  
which we ascribe to Almighty God.

Some indeed have presum'd to assert, that creation in this sense, is in itself absolutely impossible ; so that it pass'd into an axiom with the ancient *Atheists*, which they relied on as the chief support of their cause, that nothing can come from nothing. Nay, some *Theists* themselves are said to have acknowledged it, so far as to assert the eternity of matter, which however they believ'd was still subject to the Power of the co-eternal Deity, to modify and dispose of it at his pleasure. But tho' I grant that this philosophic opinion does not utterly destroy the first and main principle of religion ; and a man, not altogether inconsistently with his believing the being of God, may entertain the notion last mentioned, that is, concerning the eternity of matter ; yet I must observe, that these philosophers seem not to have duly considered the true notion of absolute eternity, which includes self-existence, necessary existence, and independence ; characters, which can never reasonably be attributed to merely passive unintelligent things, and therefore, as has been already shewn, they cannot be absolutely eternal,

SERM. nal, but their very being as well as their forms

VIII. and appearances, must be produc'd by the  
Divine Power. But indeed if we attend to the  
proposition itself abstractly, *that Nothing can  
come from Nothing*, we shall see no rational  
foundation, upon which it could be received  
as a certain truth in this sense, that nothing  
can possibly be created, or no real entity be-  
gin to be. What appearance is there of a  
contradiction in supposing that matter, a kind  
of being so imperfect, intirely passive and lia-  
ble to so many mutations, should begin to ex-  
ist, or that it should cease to be, by the effi-  
ciency of a powerful agent? Is there any ab-  
surdity in conceiving that there might have  
been more or less of it than there actually is?  
nay, is not that a supposition which our  
minds come easily into? And if so, there can  
appear no absurdity in placing it within the  
compass of creating power. One can scarcely  
imagine what should have led men into such a  
way of thinking, as that creation in the strict-  
est sense, is impossible; unless it be that they  
are sensible it is above their own power, and  
above the ordinary operations of nature which  
we discern. But shall we measure all power  
by our own scantling, and conclude there is  
none greater than what we possess, at least,  
that we can comprehend, when there are  
num-

numberless appearances daily in the world, the productions of an invisible Power, which we neither have ability to effect, nor can understand the reasons of them. SERM.  
VIII.

Yet methinks, if we attend to the operations of our own minds, the formation of new being needs not appear so strange to us, as to give any occasion for imagining it to be impossible. For tho' our minds are unequal to the production of new substances, yet their works are so far above the operations of matter, which are the objects of our senses, that creation is not more unlike the highest efforts of the human capacity. The rising up of new ideas and sentiments in the mind, and new dispositions; its giving by its own activity a new determination to the exercise of its own faculties; and raising an intirely new motion in some bodies;—I say, creation is not more unlike these, than they are to mechanism; which shews us that operations of one sort can give us no idea of another. But we have no reason on that account, to deny the possibility of them. Supposing an intelligent being to have no idea of self-determining power, (which is no impossible supposition, for there does not appear to us any such connexion between the ideas of perception and self-determining action, but that they may be separated;) supposing

SERM. sing this, I say, spontaneous action would seem  
 VIII. as strange to such a being, as making something out of nothing does to us: And there would in that case, be the same reason for denying the possibility of the *former*, that any man has for denying the *other*; indeed there is no more reason in either case, than a blind man has to deny that there is, or can be, any such thing as light or colours.

But why should any man imagine that the power of bringing things into being from pure non-existence, is absurd, who, reflecting on himself, is naturally led to conclude, that he began to be, and therefore is an instance of a new substantial production, by creating Power. Every man knows that his own personality, that is, his consciousness had a commencement, and is of no very long duration; (for the arbitrary supposition of the pre-existence of souls even from eternity, we may pass by, as a conceit not worthy of our notice, being supported by no kind of evidence; nor is the creature here spoken of a new spiritual substance abstractly, but a new person;) and since this thinking conscious Self, a substantial Being, of whose existence we have the greatest certainty, began to be, not of itself, but produced by a Cause, it may be to us a satisfying proof of creating Power. For, what greater difficulty

difficulty can there be in conceiving that God SERM.  
*made heaven and earth,* than in conceiving VIII.

*that he formed the self-conscious spirit of man within him?* Is matter any more real than the principle of thought and volition? And could not the Power which gave existence to the *one*, also produce the *other*? To say that the spirit is no more than a certain modification or quality of matter, arising from the figure, composition and motion of its more subtle parts, is a pretence which I have elsewhere disprov'd, and shall not now consider it. But without entering into any inquiry concerning the nature of substances, material or immaterial, and the power they may possibly be endued with, of which we have very little knowledge; any man who calmly attends to the beginning of his own personal existence, that is, of his conscious thinking, must see in it an exertion of power of which he can form no distinct idea; and which he cannot but be convinc'd is to him as inexplicable as the creation of the material world.

But tho' creation in the strictest sense, or making things out of pure nothing, is far from being absurd, (indeed there lies no just objection against it; for its being incomprehensible to us is no argument at all, since it does not appear to our minds impossible, or to imply



SERM. a contradiction; on the contrary, we have

VIII. *great reason to believe that both our own spirits, and the matter of the universe, were originally the productions of infinite Power, out of absolute non-existence; yet creation, in this strictest sense, is not the principal and most obvious manifestation, whereby we understand the invisible things of God, his eternal Power and Godhead. But that which may be also, and usually is stiled creation, and which by the clearest evidence of reason we know to be the work of the Deity; namely, the disposing all things in the world into the regular forms which we see, and framing them into vast and beautiful systems, which (comprehending an infinite variety of parts, all plac'd in the most exact order, and all conspiring to make one harmonious whole,) shew not only the perfect intelligence, but the activity of the great Author, and that he has an unlimited command over universal nature. When we consider that he telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names; he covereth the heaven with clouds, and prepareth rain for the earth; he giveth snow like wool, and scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes\*; he stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and bangeth the earth upon nothing; he bindeth up the waters in his thick cloud, and*

\* Psal. cxlvii,

*and in what Sense to be understood.*

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*the cloud is not rent under them\**; he hath SERM.  
VIII.  
*measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,*  
*and meted out the heaven with a span, and*  
*comprehended the dust of the earth in a mea-*  
*sure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and*  
*the hills in a balance†;—when, I say, we con-*  
*sider all this, we must conclude that great is*  
*our Lord and of great power, these are only a*  
*part of his ways, how little a portion is heard*  
*of him, but the thunder of his power who can*  
*understand‡?*

For it is to be observ'd, that the power of a voluntary agent must still be supposed superior to all its effects; all his strength is not exhausted in his works, but the virtue which produc'd them is sufficient to produce more. So that tho' we knew all the works of God, which we do not, we should not thereby be able to make a judgment concerning the utmost extent of his power, which remains one undecaying principle of operation, sufficient for new productions beyond what we can imagine. But the effects of Divine Omnipotence which actually exist, far surpass our comprehension. It is one advantage not unworthy of our notice here, which we have by the modern improvements of natural philosophy, that thereby our idea of the works of God is greatly enlarged. Formerly men were

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used

\* Job xxvi. † Isaiah xl. ‡ Job xxvi. 14.

SERM. used to think that this earth is the only habi-  
VIII tation of living creatures, except that the an-  
gels, pure spirits, who require no such place  
of abode, stand in the immediate presence of  
God, and surround his throne in the heavens.  
But later and more accurate observation has  
given men reason to believe that other bodies  
of a vast magnitude, within the solar system,  
and of a constitution not unlike that of our  
globe, are also inhabited. Why should it  
enter into our minds to imagine that such  
stupendous orbs are made for nothing, but to  
be very imperfectly discerned by mankind?  
Is it not much more rational to think, that  
since they are fitted for beings of a constitution  
like ours, they are possess'd by such; and that  
by their constant rotations round their own  
axis, and by their periodical revolutions about  
the sun as their center, they are illuminated  
and warm'd by it in the same manner as the  
earth is? Nor is it unlikely that the fixed stars,  
shining by their own unborrowed light, at so  
prodigious a distance from us that no judg-  
ment can be made of it, are the centers of  
other systems, each of them perhaps as large  
as this; and how many there may be of them,  
and how remote from each other as well as  
from us, no one of mankind can pretend,  
with the least degree of probability, to con-  
jecture.

jecture. These speculations, which in the SERM.  
main seem to be just, being founded on ob- VIII.  
servation of the magnitude and distance of the  
heavenly bodies, and their visible variations,  
tend to give us a very magnificent idea of the  
works and the power of God. How wonder-  
ful are they? How great is *He, worthy to re-*  
*ceive glory and honour, who has created all these*  
*things for his good pleasure*; who has rais'd  
worlds above worlds, far beyond the reach of  
human knowledge, all of them stock'd with  
proper inhabitants, qualified to understand  
and admire his perfections displayed in them,  
and to shew forth his praise?

But the *everlasting God*, the creator of the  
heavens and the earth, *fainteth not nor is wea-*  
*ry, his hand is not shortned*, nor has his strength  
suffer'd any abatement by all he has done. It  
is impossible for us to imagine what works of  
the same, or of different kinds, he is able to  
produce. One thing we are sure of, and it  
gives us a very awful idea of his Omnipotence,  
that he can destroy his own works; for the  
power which has made, is sufficient to unmake,  
and the beings which owe their existence  
originally to him, and continually depend up-  
on him, must cease to be, at his pleasure. He  
can unhinge the whole frame of nature, and  
dissolve the great systems which his Power  
has rais'd. It is not so easy for human force

262 *God's Almighty Power, by what acts manifested,*  
SERM. to demolish the fabrics, which with great  
VIII. labour it has erected, as for Omnipotence to

reduce the heavens and the earth to their original chaos; for they can none of them make the least resistance to his will. Thus the Scripture elegantly describes the sovereign dominion of Almighty God over the world, and his power to remove those parts of it which seem to be built on the most stable foundation. *He removeth the mountains and they know it not, he overturneth them in his anger, he shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble; he commandeth the sun and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars \*.* The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof; *he divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud †.* *He rebuketh the sea and maketh it dry, and drieth up the rivers. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burnt at his presence ‡.* So that if the whole world is not involved in confusion, and the frame of nature does not suffer an universal dissolution, it does not proceed from any defect of power in God, but from the perfection of his wisdom and goodness. Which leads me to observe,

2dly, The manifestation of the power of God in preserving his creatures, as he originally

\* Job ix. † Job xxi. ‡ Nahum . . . 5



ginally gave them being, and in governing them. The whole universe subsists by the word of his power, and all the parts of it, with their various motions and changes, are so directed by his mighty providence, as to answer the ends for which they were made. I observed before \*, that some of the greatest and most common appearances of nature are not to be accounted for otherwise than by the interposition of the Divine power. And tho' this is often the less attended to because of the apparent uniformity in the course of things, (which perhaps unthoughtful men consider as if they followed by a kind of natural necessity, rather than intelligent direction;) yet a serious reflection would satisfy us that the *band of the Lord does all these things*; that it is Divine Providence which upholds the order of the world, and rules the course of nature; *which makes the day spring know its place, and stretches out the shadows of the evening; that commands the sun to shine by day, and the moon by night; that prepares a place for the rain, and a way for the lightning of thunder; that maketh the herbs to grow upon the earth, and brings the fruits to perfection; that fixes the limits of the sea and the dry land.* I say, the Providence of God does all this as truly, and by as real an efficiency, as if there were

SERM.

VIII.

SERM. no order and dependence of things, no general  
 VIII. laws by which they are govern'd, but the ap-  
 pearances of every moment were so many se-  
 parate, independent effects, requiring, each a  
 several cause, or at least, a several unconnec-  
 ted exertion of power to produce them. The  
 wisdom of God is conspicuous in the simpli-  
 city of his providential administration; at least,  
 our finite understandings are enabled to dis-  
 cern and to admire his counsel in the regula-  
 rity of his works, by what we call simplicity,  
 as being more easy to our understandings, tho'  
 no more easy to his infinite power and wis-  
 dom. When we see a train of events follow-  
 ing each other in orderly succession, and a  
 multitude of effects depend on one cause, it  
 gives us a delightful idea of wise and steady  
 counsel in the government of the world; and  
 we are thereby directed to form our schemes  
 and take the measures of our conduct in life.  
 But it would be extremely stupid so to engage  
 our attention to the settled course of events, as  
 to overlook the invisible power which governs  
 them; not to *behold the majesty of the Lord,*  
*nor regard the operations of his hands.*

Yet God does not confine himself to what  
 are commonly called the laws of nature,  
 really no more than the ordinary series of his  
 own operations; (for inanimate things, which

we are here considering, do not properly SERM. obey laws, they are ruled only by an immediate influence of power, which they cannot resist;) but, I say, God is not confined to these laws, sometimes he acts against the common course of nature, whereby he manifests his power, not as if it were really greater in these instances, or the operation more difficult to him; but to awaken the attention of men by an extraordinary interposition, and excite them to their duty. Of this sort of works were the great flood, whereby *the old world of the ungodly was overthrown*; the consuming of *Sodom and Gomorrah* by fire from heaven; the dividing of the *Red Sea*, so that the *Israelites* were preserv'd and the *Egyptians* drown'd; the terrible convulsions of nature at the giving of the law in the wilderness; the preternatural events which accompanied the death and resurrection of our Saviour; and many miraculous works done by him and his apostles, of which we have clear historical evidence. 'Tis true, we cannot be absolutely certain from the nature of the things themselves, that all these, and such like events, are the peculiar works of Omnipotence: How far the capacity of inferior unseen agents may reach, and what power they may have, by Divine Permission, over what is commonly called

SERM. called the course of nature, we know not.

VIII. But this we are sure of, that there is one eternal King whose *throne is prepared in heaven and his kingdom is over all*, the Fountain of all power and authority. And if his ministering spirits are able to effect such prodigies as are astonishing to us, this heightens, instead of lessening our idea of his Majesty; since the highest of *them* are under his command, and absolutely subject to his disposal, holding their powers, and the very foundation of them, their being, by no other tenure than his free gift.

3dly, The Perfection of God's supreme power is display'd in the manner of his operation, which is, not like that of finite active beings, gradual and successive, painful and laborious, but his work is easy to him, as it is irresistible by any opposite strength; and if there be a repetition of Divine acts, or a continuance in working, that does not arise from any difficulty he finds in the execution of his purposes, which is the case with inferior agents, and the cause of their leisurely proceeding. But the greatest of all the works of God, I mean the most incomprehensible to us, perhaps to any finite mind, is, and must be perform'd in an instant, that is creating things out of nothing, or giving them the begin-

beginning of their existence ; for the transition from nothing to being admits of no succession. We have however, some faint imperfect image of the Divine operations in the activity of our minds. For tho' we are slow and weak in understanding, and the defect of our knowledge must be supplied, so far as we are able to supply it, by consideration, that we may form our purposes as wisely as we can, yet when they are form'd, the execution is neither tedious nor difficult, within the narrow sphere to which we are confined. We are not conscious of any thing but the mere determination of the will, (than which nothing can be conceiv'd quicker in producing its immediate effect,) that moves the organs of the body, which alone are properly, tho' not absolutely subject to the mind ; more distant works necessarily require longer time, from the nature of material instruments, and the imperfect power we have over them. But if we suppose a spirit intimately present in all parts of the universe, having a more perfect knowledge of, and absolute dominion over every thing in nature, than we have over the nearest and most immediate organs of sensation and motion ; this gives us a faint notion of the Divine power, and the manner of its exercise ; it operates with the most perfect ease and without



268 *God's Almighty Power, by what acts manifested,*

SERM. out any resistance; the counsels of God are

VIII. fulfilled only by his determining them to be

done. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth\**; and when he sendeth forth his commandment upon earth, his word runneth very swiftly, giving snow, hoar-frost and ice: *Again, he sends his powerful word and melteth them, and causeth the waters to flow†*. From this imperfect account it appears, that we cannot think too highly of the power of God, which is absolute, and properly called *Almighty*, since to it the whole world and all things therein owe their being and perfection: For no reason can be assign'd why any thing within the bounds of possibility, should not be if God pleases, seeing it requires no more power to produce it, than has been actually manifested in the production of that which does exist. I come in the

2d place, to consider in what sense, and with what limitations, the doctrine of Divine Omnipotence is to be understood. And the first and most obvious limitation has been just now insinuated, namely, that when it is said the power of God is infinite, the meaning is, not that it reaches beyond possibility, or extends to the doing of what is in itself impossible, that is, implies a contradiction. The

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measure

\* Psal. xxxiii. 6,

† Psal. cxlvii.

measure of possibility to us is conceivableness; **SERM.**  
that of which we can have no idea, but that **VIII.**  
reflecting on it, appears to be nothing, we  
pronounce impossible, and not to be effected  
by any power. I do not intend by this that  
we should call things impossible, or pretend  
to judge that the Power of God cannot pro-  
duce them, merely because we cannot com-  
prehend, or have any idea at all of the man-  
ner of operation; but where there is an appa-  
rent inconsistency in the idea of the effect, so  
that one part of it necessarily destroys another;  
for that is really the idea of nothing, which  
is not the object of power. To say that by  
the Power of God, a thing may be and not  
be at the same time, that a whole may be no  
greater than one of its parts, that number or  
magnitude may be at once equal and unequal,  
that bodies, contrary to their nature, may be  
without solidity, and be in different places at  
the same time;—to say that these and such like  
absurdities may be effected by the Power of  
God, is only to set his power in a ridiculous  
light, and to destroy all the foundations of  
our knowledge. And it is absurd to imagine,  
that the Being of God himself, and his attri-  
butes, essentially unchangeable, are subject to  
any power whatever. And therefore,

SERM. 2dly, We ought not to ascribe to the Power  
VIII. of God any thing which is unworthy of his  
other perfections, any thing which is inconsistent with the wisdom, or the moral rectitude and goodness of his nature; for that is absurdly to set the attributes of the Deity at variance with each other, and to dishonour his true character under the pretence of magnifying his power. Men may foolishly imagine, that what they call arbitrary power, is a most exalted and glorious condition; judging not by any real perfection in the thing itself, but only by the distinction and superiority which it gives them above others. If by arbitrary power be meant that which is independent and liable to no controul from without, in that sense it does belong to Almighty God: But if it signifies a power of acting according to mere will and pleasure, without any regard to right and reason;—this is so far from being in itself an excellency, however it may be desir'd by weak ambitious mortals, that nothing can appear more deform'd, and odious to the unbiass'd human mind. Can any man, calmly considering, and not under the influence of passion, think brutal force amiable, that is, force separated from reason, equity and goodness? Rather does it not fill the mind with horror? If we compare human governments  
of

of these directly opposite characters; the one SERM.  
 limited by law and justice, where the rights VIII.  
 of subjects are secured on the same equitable  
 foundation with the prerogative of the prince,  
 and equally safe from violent invasion; the  
 other wholly despotic, where the lives, liber-  
 ties and estates of men, are absolutely subject  
 to the caprice of a passionate mortal, accus-  
 tomed to tyrannical cruelty, and flatter'd into  
 an opinion that it is the highest glory, which  
 the human nature is capable of being rais'd  
 to;—upon such a comparison, it will be easy  
 to determine whether arbitrary power, in the  
 sense already explain'd, be a real perfection  
 in the esteem of intelligent beings. Far be  
 it from us to entertain any such notions of  
 the Divine dominion, which, tho' it be ab-  
 solutely uncontroulable, that is, it cannot be  
 resisted by any opposite strength, (*for who can  
 stay God's hand, or say unto him, what dost  
 thou?*) yet is always exercis'd with perfect  
 wisdom and moral rectitude. It is therefore  
 alike impossible to alter the nature of things  
 which he has made, that is, make them to be  
 what at the same time he has made them not to  
 be, (that were to destroy the power by which  
 they are produc'd and do subsist) and for him  
 to act against that invariable reason which  
 must always appear to his perfect understand-  
 ing,

SERM. ing, and against his moral perfections which  
 VIII. are, equally with power, inseparable from his  
 essence. And for this reason the Scripture  
 justly asserts moral evil to be impossible for  
 God, or any thing which supposes him to  
 have done amiss; as when it says, that it is  
 impossible for him to lie, and to repent;  
 which impossibility, tho' in some respects dif-  
 ferent from what is meant by contradiction  
 in the nature of things, yet stands upon as  
 sure a foundation; for the attributes of God  
 which are called moral, do as really and im-  
 mutably belong to his nature, as his natural  
 perfections, and are as necessary a part of his  
 character. Thus *Elihu* excellently speaks  
 concerning the government of Providence \*,  
*Far be it from Gnd that he should do wicked-*  
*ness, and from the Almighty, that he should*  
*commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall*  
*be render unto him, and cause every man to*  
*find according to his ways. Yea, surely God*  
*will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty*  
*pervert judgment.* And this, instead of shew-  
 ing any defect of power, arises from the ple-  
 nitude of it; for, as *Elihu* adds in the 13th  
 verse, *Who hath given him a charge over the*  
*earth? or who hath disposed the whole world?*  
 Men are therefore tyrannical, because they  
 are impotent; a secret consciousness of de-  
 pendent,

\* Job xxxiv. 10, 11, 12.



dependant, precarious power, and a misgiving fear of harm from others, whom their passions represent as formidable enemies, put them upon exerting their utmost ability, in executing their wrath without delay. But he who is secure in his unchangeable All-sufficiency, absolutely independant, and therefore incapable of fear from any adverse power, or of any other passion which terminates in self-defence, can never be tempted to act otherwise than according to the most perfect wisdom, rectitude and goodness.

To form in us a right temper towards God, and that affectionate practical regard to him, which is our principal duty, we should carefully endeavour to have just notions concerning his government (I mean that which is most strictly and properly so called) over rational and moral agents. The sole foundation of it cannot be the natural attribute of Power, for that alone can never produce such obedience, as the voice of our own reason will pronounce truly good, and acceptable to the Deity. So the human mind is constituted, as necessarily to discern the difference between moral good and evil, and be directed to form its conduct by a regard to that difference, otherwise it cannot enjoy inward tranquillity with self-approbation. If this be the inva-

274 *God's Almighty Power, by what acts manifested,*

SERM. riable law of our nature, the declared will of  
 VIII. any being, how powerful soever, cannot be  
 the rule of our actions, inconsistently with  
 our original moral sentiments, nor indeed  
 any farther than as it appears agreeable to  
 them. The true foundation therefore of  
 God's moral government is, not his absolute  
 power to dispose of the creatures as he pleases,  
 but the unchangeable rectitude and goodness  
 of his nature, manifested in that moral hu-  
 man constitution, of which he is the Au-  
 thor: Tho' the consideration of his natural  
 dominion powerfully enforces our obedience,  
 as containing motives that rationally work up-  
 on our hopes and fears, which are not indeed  
 the original springs of morality, but of great  
 use, especially in this imperfect state of trial,  
 to support the mind against temptations, and  
 answer objections taken from the seeming op-  
 position of virtue to our interest.

Again, we naturally consider all just go-  
 vernment over intelligent agents as intended  
 for their good ; so that 'tis scarcely possible,  
 any power or authority over men should ap-  
 pear to the human mind amiable, which does  
 not pursue this end. The same is the great  
 ruling principle of action in every good mem-  
 ber of society as such, and he studies accord-  
 ing to his station and capacity, to promote  
 the

the public benefit in the best manner he can. SERM.

If the true interest of a community were uni- VIII.  
versally known, and all the members sincere-  
ly disposed to pursue it uniformly, there

would be no occasion for laws; but therefore they are necessary, because many of the subjects are ignorant of their duty to the public, or may be diverted from attending to it by their private irregular affections and passions. Human civil constitutions provide against these inconveniencies as well as they can, tho' still but imperfectly. Those forms of government are the best, which most effectually preserve the power of legislation from the influence of human passion, caprice and corruption, and secure its continuance in persons of the greatest reputation for wisdom and integrity: For these are the characters of highest authority among rational beings, and which only are regarded by ingenuous minds. Penalties added to Laws, which derive all their force from mere power, cannot produce a willing and reasonable obedience; and, as *St. Paul* justly says, \* such laws with sanctions, were made, not for the righteous, but for the disobedient and the lawless.

But the Divine moral government, as the obligation it lays upon us cannot be satisfied otherwise than by an intelligent and affec-

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tionate

SERM. tionate obedience, so every part of its exercise

VIII. carries the clearest evidence of wisdom, equity and goodness, the stable foundations of

authority which reason cannot resist. Whatever *God requires* of us, he at the same time *shews to be good*, perfectly agreeable to the cool dictates of our own understandings; either what appears intrinsically good at first view, such as the love of himself and our fellow-creatures, or what, upon calm reflection, we must discern to have a necessary connexion with those principal duties, as plain consequences from them, or as proper means in order to our performing them. 'Tis true, that for the purposes of morality as well as of civil government, every subject has not sufficient knowledge to discover the best means; and therefore God may condescend to interpose, (as he actually has interposed where he has granted a revelation to men,) for promoting true moral piety and virtue, to establish certain positive institutions, which are only to be considered as means of religion; but even those positive institutions, at least in *Christianity*, may be discerned, by attentive minds, to be eminently useful to the moral ends for which they are appointed, and so far they stand upon a moral foundation: And where the usefulness of such positive appointments cannot

cannot be clearly discerned, our obligation to SERM.  
VIII.  
the observance of them does not arise from

God's absolute supremacy and natural dominion over us, which cannot produce a reasonable and liberal service, but from a firm persuasion of his immutable rectitude and goodness, and of his unerring wisdom. Tho' we do not at first view see the propriety and expediency of every such institution in particular, yet deference to the perfect wisdom and goodness of our Ruler, who appointed it for our advantage, does rationally determine us to use it with diligence and the best application of our thinking powers, that we may obtain the benefit by it which he graciously intended.

These, I think, are the best and most becoming sentiments we can have of God's moral government. It is founded, not on his sovereign irresistible power and natural dominion, but on his absolutely perfect purity, wisdom and goodness: The end of it is the most absolute universal good and happiness of the rational creation: Its laws are perfect *truth and righteousness*, which every proper subject, that is, every intelligent creature may see, and thereby be induced to yield a reasonable and willing obedience, which alone is real religion, and only pleasing to him. His power in the administration of this government is ex-



278 *God's Almighty Power, by what acts manifested,*  
SERM. exercised, not arbitrarily, but according to the  
VIII. most perfect equity; and rewards and punishments are distributed in exact proportion to the measure of moral good or evil, in the dispositions and actions of every particular moral agent.

There is however some part of the Divine administration, which in another sense, with respect to us, may be called arbitrary; that is, we cannot pretend to find out the reasons of it, but ought to rest satisfied in the sovereign freedom of his will. What I mean is, that tho' God always preserves inviolable the rights which he has given to his creatures, and acts towards all of them according to the exactest measures of wisdom, equity and goodness, not one of them ever has reason to complain of being treated with an undue severity; yet, as it pleases him to manifest his power, his manifold wisdom and goodness, in the variety of his works, it is not to be expected that we should comprehend the particular grounds of this variety, or understand the reasons why he makes a distinction among his creatures: this only we are sure of, that he never injures any of them, nay, that he deals bountifully with all, which are the proper objects of goodness. The Potter's power over the clay, is a similitude which the prophet *Jeremy* uses; and after

ter him the apostle *Paul*, to represent the dominion of God over the creatures, and particularly men. As the Potter intending vessels for various uses, out of the same mass arbitrarily chooses materials for the coarser, and the finer sort, distinguishing them by his workmanship according to the different purposes they are designed for; so the forming hand of God has made a difference among his creatures, as it pleased him; out of the same matter, originally alike capable of all forms, he has made bodies terrestrial and celestial, with all their different glories, the shining constellations in the heavens, beautiful flowers, and clods of earth. In like manner there is an apparent diversity in the condition of intelligent beings, towards whom the Divine moral perfections are exercised. They are of superior and inferior orders, some indued with higher, some with lower powers; for which distinction, so far as it relates to individuals, and that they are appointed each to their particular rank, no reason is to be given but that it so pleased the sovereign Lord of all. But he is just and good to every species, and every individual of them; none has cause of complaint, but ought to acknowledge the bounty of the Creator, whose condition of being is better than Non-existence. Particu-

SERM. larly among mankind, the wisdom of Provi-

VIII.

dence has seen fit to appoint a great difference in many respects. Their outward estates, the constitution of their bodies, the natural endowments of their minds, the opportunities for improving them, and their advantages for attaining to the knowledge of religion,—all these are very unequal; some are rich, some poor; some weak, others strong; some are favoured with excellent means of education and instruction, whilst others are bred up in ignorance. And especially the privileges of God's peculiar people, first appropriated to the *Jews*, and afterwards enlarg'd to the *Christian* nations, which the Scripture highly celebrates, as they are indeed very great, (for God has favoured his people with an express revelation, *he hath shewed them his word, his statutes and his judgments, while he has not dealt so with other nations* \*;) these privileges, I say, are only to be attributed to the distinguishing favour of God. It was not for any merit in the *Jews* above all others, that God chose them to be a peculiar people unto himself; and the nations in which the light of *Christianity* has shined, were perhaps sunk as deep in ignorance, superstition and vice, as any other in the world.

But

\* Psal. cxlviii. 19, 20.

*and in what Sense to be understood.*

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But tho' in this branch of his administration God may be said to act arbitrarily, giving SERM.  
VIII.  
*no account of his matters*, and it is necessary that it should be so, for the order of the world and the great ends of his providence; yet he never acts against the rules of equity and goodness towards any of his creatures. There's none of mankind left without manifestations of his mercy, and the distinction he makes by dispensing his superadded gifts *severally as he will*, is not the measure of his final distribution as judge of the world. If he bestows his favours freely on some, he does not thereby injure others, as our Saviour teaches us in his parable \*, applying this most reasonable defence of the Divine government to the case of the *Jews*, who are represented as murmuring, because the *Gentiles*, called late to the service of God, were advanced to the same privileges with them. The answer is, to which there can be no colourable pretence of an exception, *Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?* And in the parable, *Mat. xxv.* God is represented as acting with sovereign freedom, in committing his goods to the care of his servants; *to one he delivers five talents, to another two, and to another one*, according to his own will, or according to the judgment which his perfect

wisdom

\* Matt. xx.

282 *God's Almighty Power, by what acts manifested,*  
SERM. wisdom makes of *their several abilities*. This

VIII. unequal distribution makes indeed a difference  
in their capacity of service, and lays a foundation for different degrees of happiness, which may be supposed in every state and every period of our existence, consistently with the righteousness and the goodness of God's moral government; but it is not the measure by which recompences are awarded, for in the sequel of the parable, we find *they* are given according to the improvements severally made by the servants. God will render to every man impartially according to his own works, and the degrees of his diligence and fidelity in using the talents he was entrusted with; not according to the talents given him, or the abilities and opportunities he enjoy'd, for these were properly the *goods of another*.

I shall conclude with this one reflection on what has been last insisted on, that it gives us a just idea of the Divine government over the moral world, shewing in what sense it is arbitrary, and in what sense it is not: From both which useful instruction arises; and indeed there is nothing comprehended in the supreme power and dominion of Almighty God, of greater importance, and more directly applicable to ourselves. On the one hand, since it has pleased the great Ruler of the world,



world, to manifest his power wisdom and SERM.  
goodness, in the variety of his works, and of VIII.  
his dispensations towards his creatures, we  
ought in this to recognise his absolute su-  
premacy, and with all humility to acquiesce  
in his sovereign and uncontrollable disposition  
of things. In this great fabric of the universe,  
wherein God has displayed the glory of his  
Majesty and of all his perfections, it was ne-  
cessary there should be a diversity; for in the  
different conditions appointed to the creatures,  
and the different degrees of perfection and hap-  
piness communicated to them, his glory shines  
more conspicuously than it would have done  
in an uniform production, and in their various  
ways, his works harmoniously join in praising  
him. Since then it was necessary that the  
world should be diversified in the manner it is,  
who but the Creator himself could distinguish  
the ranks of beings, and appoint to every one  
its proper station. *As for his good pleasure all  
things were created,* there can be no pretence  
of injustice done to any of them; for they  
could have no rights capable of being violated,  
prior to their being, nor indeed any pretence  
of unkindness, if their state is more eligible  
than not to be, which must be acknowledg'd  
concerning the state wherein all the creatures  
were made. *Shall the thing formed say to him*

that

284 *God's Almighty Power, by what acts manifested,*  
SERM. *that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?*

VIII. Shall a brute complain that it was not made  
a man, or a man that he is inferior to an angel? Every kind of beings, and every individual, have reason to be satisfied with the condition appointed to them, and no ground of discontent; always supposing it to be better than non-existence. For if there were any ground of complaint, any one must have it to whom that lot should fall; and then the objection must lie against the wisdom of God, and the exercise of his power, in making any such order of creatures at all: Which objection an attentive mind must condemn, for who can take upon him to say that any thing in the works of God is superfluous, that any particular species of beings was not necessary, and a proper part of the universe. The same reasoning will hold in proportion, for mens submitting to the order of Providence, in the worldly condition which is appointed them. For the place of our nativity and education, our state of sickness or health, riches or poverty, with a multitude of other such like circumstances, are as much subject to the Divine disposal and direction, as to what species of beings we belong; and no more strictly within the sphere of distributive justice, the final and complete exercise whereof is reserved

and in what Sense to be understood.

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to a future state. God does not leave the go-  
VERNMENT of human affairs to inferior causes,

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he interposes himself by a sovereign irresistible efficiency. Vain mortals are apt to imagine that the differences of their condition are principally owing to themselves, and they ascribe the success of their endeavours to their own skill and industry; but it is much rather to be attributed to the sovereign agency of Divine Providence, as the *Psalmist* justly observes;

*\* Promotion cometh not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south; but God is judge, he pulleth down one and setteth up another. It becomes us therefore in all the changes of our state, humbly to acknowledge the supreme dominion of Almighty God in the government of the world, who has divided the earth and the enjoyments of it among the children of men, in what proportions he sees fit. And as they who are in lower situations, ought not to envy their superiors; so neither have the great any reason to glory in their acquisitions, and treat their inferiors with contempt.† Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness,*

\* Psal. lxxv. 6.

† Jer. ix. 23, 24.

286 *God's Almighty Power, by what acts manifested,*  
**SERM.** *ness, righteousness and judgment in the earth.*

**VIII.** Let him rejoice, and be humbly confident in the supreme and absolute dominion of that God who wisely governs the world, distinguishing some by his special favour, without doing wrong to any. To which purpose also may be applied (the case refer'd to, being of a parallel nature, and the reasoning founded on the same principle) what *St. Paul* says concerning the extraordinary gifts of ministration, wherewith some were endowed for the service of the *Christian Church*,—\* *Who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive ; why then dost thou glory ?*

But the Divine government is not arbitrary in another sense ; it is not administred by lawless force, like that of the tyrants in this world, but with the most impartial equity, tempered with goodness, and directed in its exercise by the most perfect wisdom. † *God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, for thou renderest to every man according to his work.* Tho' he bestows his gifts freely as a sovereign, and makes what distinctions he pleases among his creatures, in the capacities of their nature, and in respect of outward advantages conferr'd on some, which

\* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

† Psal. lxii. 11, 12.

*and in what Sense to be understood.*

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which are deny'd to others; yet in the exer-  
cise of his moral government, especially in the

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distribution of final recompences, he will  
strictly observe the exactest measures of equity.

*He will not contend with his creatures by his great power; nor shew his absolute dominion by crushing under his feet the prisoners of the earth, who have no defence against his might; but will, without respect of persons, render to all men according to their works. Which consideration, as it is terrible to the impenitent workers of iniquity, whom no power can screen from his just displeasure, so it is a never-failing encouragement to good men, who, rejoicing in the testimony of their consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity they have had their conversation in the world, assure their hearts before him; confident that his power will not be employed against them, but for their salvation; and therefore, because he is God Almighty, they walk before him and are perfect.*

S E R-



# SERMON IX.

The true Notion of Divine Omniscience, of its Nature, Manner and Extent.

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Pfalm cxlvii. 5.

*His understanding is infinite.*

SERM. IX. **I** Have observed on another occasion, that the main controversy between *Atheists* and believers in God, is concerning his intelligence. None of the infidels, whether ancient or modern, have in express terms denied the being of God; but by that word they mean, not a particular designing and perfect Agent, the Maker of all things, (which is the true notion of the Deity,) but either blind unintelligent necessity, to which they attribute the existence of the world and every thing it contains, as the cause of all, or universal substances, comprehending the whole universe and all beings in it. As therefore in opposition to these absurd notions, we have  
full

full convincing proof of the existence of one SERM.  
IX.  
Supreme Being absolutely perfect, the Maker and governor of the world; by the same clear evidence we know, that intelligence is a primary and essential attribute of his nature. And as this is what all his works teach us, the inanimate, the sensitive and the rational parts of the creation, join in proclaiming the understanding of their Maker; so without acknowledging it, we can have no right conceptions of him at all. The idea of a being without knowledge, even supposed eternal, immense and all-powerful, as *that* signifies not a voluntary activity, but a necessary cause, is really an idea of nothing at all to the purposes of religion, of nothing which can raise any admiration, honour and esteem, and is indeed of no importance to us. The worship of an ignorant Deity is the reproach of human nature; as no tolerable apology could be made for the *Heathens*, who served idols *that had eyes and saw not, and ears but heard not*; so none can be made for us, if we pay our religious homage to a being supposed void of understanding, whatever other perfections we ascribe to him, which are really no perfections at all in the deliberate esteem of the human mind.

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I shall not now attempt to prove the intelligence of the Deity in general, for that has been already done by the arguments which prove his being: nor do I pretend to give a compleat idea of the Divine knowledge, which it is not to be imagined we can comprehend, for that were to suppose that our understandings are like his, infinite: But my intention in this discourse is, to make such observations concerning the nature, the manner and extent of it, as may give us a just and magnificent, tho' imperfect idea of that adorable perfection, and tend to produce those pious dispositions, and that dutiful respect which it claims from us.

*First,* It is certain that the knowledge of God extends to the whole compass of existence. Since all things that have being are either God himself or his works, it is impossible that any thing should be unknown to him. He is the most excellent of all objects, and the most incomprehensible by us; but yet a reflection on what passes in our own minds will lead us to this conclusion, that his perfections which infinitely transcend our capacity, are in the nearest and most immediate view of his own understanding: For all the conceptions, and all the actions of intelligent beings, with the principles from which they proceed,

proceed, are accompanied with consciousness. S E R M.

Of all the subjects to which we apply our IX.

thoughts, our own faculties and the exercise of them are the most clearly discerned, and the best understood by us. We know every idea that is presented to our minds, every imagination, every desire and volition, every enjoyment; the self-conscious spirit of a man knows every thing in him; and so we must judge concerning all intelligent beings, even to the highest and most comprehensive understanding. Now if God thoroughly knows his own perfections, if he knows his eternity better than we do our temporary duration, and his immensity more perfectly than we do our limited condition of being; if he knows his own perfect comprehension of things, but as clearly as we do our sensations, and his Almighty power, as clearly as we discern the limited activity of our minds;—This is an extent of knowledge which seems to follow necessarily from the supposition of his intelligence, as evident as his being, but must appear to us very great, the object being of all others the most above our understanding, and past our finding out. Indeed God's knowledge of himself, of the proper exercise and unlimited perfection of his own powers, may be said in some sense to be the knowledge of

SERM. all things; for the utmost bounds of possibility

IX. do not exceed Omnipotence, and the whole  
 compass of truth is within the reach of infinite  
 understanding. I have observed elsewhere, \*  
 that the Essences of all things must, before the  
 formation of the universe, have been known  
 to the eternal Mind, as every wise agent forms  
 a design in his thoughts before he executes it.  
 Can any thing be difficult to him who sees all  
 things in the first Cause, the whole frame of  
 nature and all its parts, with the intire series  
 of events from the foundation of the world, in  
 his own counsels; who sees them, I say, with  
 as great clearness, and with as great certainty,  
 as we do the perceptions and determinations  
 of our own minds?

But it is directly and immediately evident,  
 that the whole of created existence is perfectly  
 known to God, because it is all the work  
 of his hands, and upheld by the word of his  
 power. Every voluntary agent must be sup-  
 posed to understand his own productions; the  
 skill of the meanest artificer reaches to the  
 limits of his own art; tho' he may be unac-  
 quainted with the nature of the materials he  
 works upon, he knows the labour he bestows  
 on them, and the compositions, figures, and  
 other sensible effects which depend upon his  
 own operation. Since therefore God is the  
 volun-



voluntary Maker of all things, disposing the whole frame of nature as it pleased him, and continually governing it by his own immediate agency, nothing can be hid from him. If in all that variety of being, and all the appearances which are in the universe, from the greatest to the least, from the utmost circuit of heaven to the center of the earth, there is nothing which his hand has not form'd, and his providence does not direct, every thing must be thoroughly known; for wherever his power works there his understanding discerns.

This consideration leads us to form an idea of the Divine knowledge as different from, and infinitely more perfect than ours, even with respect to those objects which are, in some measure, known to us. It is from a reflection on our own understandings we take our rise to the apprehending of that perfection in the Deity; but we ought not to imagine that things appear to him in the same manner they do to us. Nothing is more evident than that different perceptive powers have different views of the same object. Our reason in many cases corrects the report of our senses, and sees things in quite another light; much more is it to be thought that an infinitely perfect mind *sees not as man sees*, that things are known to him, not in a remote and distant

SERM. way, by their external appearances and effects, as they are to us, but that his understanding penetrates into their inmost natures,

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and discerns clearly all their properties and powers. The little knowledge we have, was given us for particular purposes, not for a thorough comprehension of things; nor are they, any of them, put absolutely into our power, to govern and to use them every way, and for all the ends they are capable of serving, which would require a thorough understanding of their nature, attributes, and powers of every kind. We discern by our senses some qualities of material objects; rather they are the occasion of exciting certain ideas in us, whereby the bountiful author of nature has made them useful to the preservation, the conveniency, and the enjoyment of life. Our reason goes a little farther, discovering by observation, and by attending to the connexions and dependencies of things, other properties and relations, which may be applied to useful purposes in life, and afford various entertainment to the mind; still however there remains a great deal unknown to us, indeed the human understanding seems to be unequal to the comprehension of any thing. But the Maker and absolute Governor of all things knows them perfectly, not by external appearances

pearances and effects ascending to the discovery of causes, as we do; but as he formed the plan of the whole universe and the intire extent of being, in his own counsels, he sees effects in their causes, having by the free determination of his own will, given them whatever measure of power and perfection they possess. None of those essences can be hid from him, of which he had the perfect idea in his own mind before the Being actually existed: He can be ignorant of no property, virtue, or efficiency, (nor any thing that can be effected by it) which is derived wholly from himself; all the powers of nature, with the remotest consequences which depend upon them, must be at once in his view; and seeing he has all the creatures absolutely under his dominion, disposing of them at his pleasure, and actually does govern them by the immediate exercise of his power, he must have, not a partial knowledge like ours, of some particular uses they serve, but a thorough understanding of their utmost capacity.

Besides the wide difference which there is between the knowledge of God and that of finite beings, particularly mankind, in the extent of them, both with respect to the number of objects, and the discernment of their nature, properties, relations and uses; the one

SERM. is narrow and confined to a few things, the

IX.

other reaches to the whole circle of being; the one is superficial and inadequate, the other sees its object on all sides; discerns not some only, but all its relations, and not the exterior appearances and effects only, but its very essence and the secret springs of all its operations. Besides this, I say, there are other important differences, relating to the manner of knowledge; and to the apprehending of those differences we are also led, by observing the exercise and progress of our own understandings in various instances. There are some of our perceptions perfect in their kind from the very beginning: Our original simple ideas are subject to no alterations, capable of no improvement; the ideas of colours and other sensible qualities remain invariably the same; the consciousness we have of our own existence, our powers, perceptions and operations, is always clear and determinate; not only so, our knowledge of some truths is distinct and compleat, from the first moment of their being intelligibly proposed, without any difficulty or labour in reasoning, and this knowledge is called intuitive. But there are other things in the knowledge of which we make proficiency, and proceed to the discernment of them by degrees. We can variously compound

pound and associate our ideas; we observe SERM.  
 their connexions and differences, their agree- IX.  
 ment and disagreement; and from one truth

clearly perceiv'd, we go on to the discovery of another, which, according to the measure of evidence that appears in the connexion, is judg'd certain or probable. Such is the narrowness of the human mind as not to be able to perceive actually at once, all things which it has known; and this defect is in some measure supplied by memory, or the revival of ideas which were in it before. This progress of our understandings, arising from their limited capacity, evidently shews their imperfection, and must be attended with difficulty, confusion, and uncertainty in some part of our knowledge, which probably in some degree, all finite beings are subject to. But the supreme Mind is *perfect in knowledge*; all things are clearly perceiv'd by it, and all their connexions, differences and relations, without any confusion, obscurity or uncertainty. The variety and multiplicity of the objects cause no perplexity in his understanding, which is large enough to contain them all, without being embarrass'd or forgetting any thing. *There is no creature that is not manifest in the sight of God, but all things are naked unto his eyes and opened, even to their inmost essences; and*  
without



SERM. without the labour of investigating truth by

IX. reasoning, he discerns, by a simple and direct intuition, the whole series of causes and effects. Thus we ought to conceive of the Divine knowledge, as altogether free from the imperfections and infirmities which cleave to ours; and tho' the intellectual powers which God has given to some creatures, as they are a convincing proof of his own intelligence, and may be justly call'd the most excellent of his works, making honourable distinctions among the creatures, in the degree wherein they are possess'd, (for knowledge is necessarily esteem'd by every rational being;) yet are they all, even the highest of them, but faint images of that original perfect understanding, from whence they are derived, which therefore justly challenges our highest admiration and esteem. Human acquirements in knowledge, short and defective as they are, procure respect; the men, who by diligent study, have improv'd their minds in useful learning, are on that account in reputation: We think of the angels with greater veneration, as a far higher order of beings, and their superior excellence consists in, at least one principal branch of it is, a more extensive knowledge. But even this is only a faint ray deriv'd from the *Father of lights*, the pure eternal Fountain, who communicates

municates light in various measures to the intellectual world, whereby it is animated, directed and fitted to proclaim his praise, yet suffers no diminution of his infinite understanding, as the sun illuminates, beautifies, and refreshes all things within its system, without any abatement of its splendor. To that purest intelligence, that most perfect Wisdom, which has *taught us more than the beasts of the field*, and to whose *inspiration* we owe our *understanding*, which is the very capacity of all our enjoyments; to that blessed, underived spring of knowledge, let our minds always give the highest honour, and pay the most dutiful respect, adore him who *commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and hath put wisdom into the heart*, the image of his own perfection.

The 2d observation concerning the Divine knowledge is, that it reaches to all the actions of free moral agents. This is a point of the greatest importance to us, and should affect our minds in the most sensible manner, because we *have to do with God*, as our Lawgiver and our Judge. He has, by various methods, made their duty known to mankind; some notices of his will are given to all men, *the work of his law is written in their hearts*, and he has *skewed them that which is good*,  
by

SERM. by the light of nature : Some of them he has

IX.

favour'd with a clear and exprefs revelation, and will call them to account for their obedience to the law they were under. Now for this important part of his adminiftration, as the fupreme Ruler of the world, he is perfectly qualified by his exact knowledge of men, of all their ways and all their works, even to the moft fecret of them. His knowledge of other things may excite our admiration ; but this more immediately concerns us, and calls for our attention, becaufe the greateft confequences depend upon it : Our happinefs in the enjoyment of his favour, if he fees that *our works are perfect*, and that we have *walked before him in integrity and with upright hearts*, or the lafting miserable effects of his difapprobation, if he knows that we have been workers of iniquity.

As no confideration can be more awful than that of the Omnifcience of God, extending to all our works, and every circumftance which may heighten their moral goodnefs or malignity ; fo it is particularly to be remember'd, that his eye penetrates into the fecret fprings of action, *he fearches the hearts, and tries the reins of the children of men*. And this is abfolutely neceffary in order to a perfect judgment of our moral behaviour. For  
virtue

virtue and vice, religion and irreligion do not S E R M.  
consist merely, or principally, in outward IX.  
acts, but in the intentions and dispositions of  
the mind, of which every man's conscience  
is a witness, for it approves or reproaches  
him, not according to the external appear-  
ance of his works, but according to the in-  
ward affections and purposes of his heart.  
Human judicature cannot proceed so far;  
works, as they appear in the view of men,  
and the sensible effects of them, come only  
under its cognisance. Indeed intention is  
suppos'd, without which an action cannot be  
said to be rational, or properly human; but  
it is not known with certainty, and if it were,  
it is but a very imperfect judgment which  
could be made by it, concerning the mora-  
lity of works. For all that civil judicature  
supposes, is, that a man is the voluntary cause  
of his own actions, or that he designs to do  
what he does, it does not pretend to judge of  
his remoter views, of the prevalent affections  
of the heart, and the motives which influenc'd  
it, and of the regard had to the approbation  
of God and of conscience; all which are  
points of the greatest moment, in order to a  
precise determination of right and wrong in  
the moral sense. But God sees, not as man  
sees; he looks not to the outward appearance,  
but

SERM. but the heart, discerning all its most secret  
IX. imaginations and contrivances. And indeed  
without this, he could not be the righteous  
Judge of the world, rendering to all men finally according to their works.

The direct proof of this point is the same that has been already insisted on, for the perfection and universal extent of God's knowledge in general; namely, his being the intelligent Cause and Disposer of all things, which shews that the active powers of the rational creatures are as well known to him, with their utmost exertions, as the passive powers of matter and all its modifications. These kinds of beings are essentially different, and so are their powers; but they are equally the work of God's hands, and therefore must be equally known to him. The free agency of some, wholly derived from, and depending on himself, does not place them out of his view; and since he is the designing Author of that faculty, and form'd it for certain ends, he must understand all its exercises, whereby it is fitted to answer those ends. And as the natural government of the Deity, from which the freest created agents are not exempted, proves his perfect knowledge of all his creatures, and all their works, so of his moral government over mankind, which requires a  
perfect



perfect knowledge of their moral actions, we have a natural intimation in our own pre-  
fating thoughts. Those to whom God has not

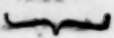
SERM.  
IX.

given any positive revealed law, yet have a rule of life written in their hearts, to which *their consciences bear witness*; and their own *accusing and excusing thoughts*, as they are attended with the greatest pleasure and pain which the mind is capable of, and which are the present sanction of the law of nature; so they are premonitions of farther rewards and punishments, to be distributed by the supreme Judge. But to this purpose they derive all their force from a secret impression, which seems to be indelibly engraven on every human heart, that God is the inspector of all our actions, and all our thoughts. With a view to a trial by men, we should have no farther solicitude than about the evidence of overt acts, because that is the rule according to which they must proceed; but since the testimony of conscience is the measure of our expectations from God, this necessarily supposes a persuasion that he is *greater than our hearts, and knows all things*. The argument will be greatly strengthened by the consideration of God's moral perfections, his rectitude, his goodness and justice, which cannot be fully exercised towards rational beings, with-

SERM. out an infallible and compleat knowledge of

IX.            their works. At present I only suppose his moral government, which cannot reasonably be doubted, since it is evident he has given us a moral nature, and a clear intimation that not only it is fit he should, but that he actually will call us to an account. Accordingly, it has been still the common belief of all men, who had any just sentiments concerning the Deity, that he is perfectly acquainted with the conduct of all moral agents, and will at some time or other, render them recompences according to their works.

If the foundation upon which we believe this particular branch of the Divine Omniscience be just, namely, the evidences of a moral constitution and government of reasonable creatures, and the natural undeceiving impressions on the minds of men, of their being accountable for all their actions to God as their Judge, the consequence must be allow'd, that his knowledge of our hearts, and of all that enters into the morality of our works, is very perfect. For the character of a moral governor requires, not only that the condition of men should be determin'd according to the moral quality of their tempers and actions in general, *that it should be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked,*

but also that the sentences pass'd upon them SERM.  
should bear a proportion to the measure of IX.  
their goodness and sinfulness in a state of trial,   
which shews how exact the knowledge of  
their Judge must be.

Altho' all men come under the denomi-  
nation of good and bad, and accordingly the  
state to which they shall be adjudged, is call'd  
a state of happiness or misery in general; yet  
both these admit of a great variety. As good  
men are not all alike good, and vicious men  
are not all alike vicious, so neither will their  
enjoyments and sufferings by the judgment of  
God be equal. \* *They who have sown bounti-  
fully shall reap bountifully, and they who have  
sown sparingly, shall reap also sparingly:* That  
is, men shall enjoy felicity in exact propor-  
tion to the degree of their virtuous affections  
and virtuous labour. On the other hand, some  
*evil servants shall be beaten with few, and some  
with many stripes;* their punishment shall be  
inflicted in proportion to the obligations they  
have violated, which depend on their various  
circumstances, capacities, and opportunities of  
doing good. Now to adjust all this exactly,  
and appoint to every man such a degree of  
happiness or of punishment, as is strictly pro-  
portionable to the measure of good or evil in  
his dispositions and his works, which a per-

SERM. sect moral government requires;—To do this,

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I say, none but an infinite understanding is sufficient, a clear and certain knowledge of the hearts of men, of the affections which are prevalent in them, of their motives of action, and of all the circumstances which concur to the perfection of their good works, or which either aggravate or extenuate their evil ones.

This extent of the Divine knowledge must appear to us wonderful. We find ourselves secure within the inclosure of our own breasts, from the inspection of every human eye; and we are sensible that none of us can discern the thoughts and designs of other men, farther than as they discover themselves by outward signs. But how shall we form an idea of an understanding which reaches to the most hidden recesses of all mens minds, and infallibly discerns the secret thoughts and intents of their hearts? Yet this evidently appears to be the prerogative of the supreme Being, who without it could not be the proper Judge of moral actions, as we are convinc'd he is, and cannot remove the impression of it out of our minds. And indeed the consideration of his Omnipresence, naturally leads us to acknowledge it: For as our own minds perceive and operate in all parts of the little systems which they

they animate, so the most perfect Mind being every where, not in a partial derived manner, but in the fulness of its active intelligence, must discern every thing. Thus the *Psalmist* celebrates the glory of the Divine Omniscience in this amazing instance of it, \* *O Lord thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down-fitting, and mine uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?* “No change of place can hide me  
“from thy All-seeing eye, for in all parts of  
“the universe, I should be alike under thy  
“inspection, and surrounded with thy powerful presence.” *Thou hast possessed my reins, thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb.*  
“As all the powers of my nature were derived from thee; as to thy forming hand  
“they owe the beginning of their existence,  
“and the various steps of their progress to  
“perfection, and are still upheld by thy  
“mighty providence; so they are continually  
“in thy view, and every exertion of them  
“is perfectly known to thee.” Since in God we live and move and have our being; since all our animal and rational powers necessarily depend upon him, and by his continued influence the frame of nature is preserved, no vital act, not even the least or

U 2

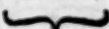
most

\* Psa. cxxxix.



SERM. most secret movement in our minds, or our  
IX. bodies, can be hid from his eye.

Before we proceed any further in our inquiry concerning the Omniscience of God, it may not be amiss to make some practical reflections on what has been already observ'd. There is no consideration more affecting to serious attentive minds, or which more directly tends to produce sincerity in our whole behaviour, than this of God's knowing our hearts. There is naturally a disposition in the minds of men to approve themselves to those intelligent beings who are witnesses of their Conduct. Thus a desire of pleasing one another has a great share in forming our outward deportment, so far as it is open to human observation. But as the Divine approbation is infinitely more important, so the desire of obtaining it has a vastly more extensive influence, reaching not only to the external behaviour, but to the inward dispositions and the intents of the heart. How ridiculous does hypocrisy appear to a man who considers that all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do? That no outward solemnities, no forms of devotion, or appearances of zeal, can impose on his perfect understanding? That he sees through the most subtle disguises and plausible

fible pretences which an insincere heart can SERM.  
put on, and that they are as odious to him as IX.  
open bare-fac'd wickedness? 


Let us therefore always remember the excellent instructions of our Saviour \* concerning acts of devotion and charity, which may also be applied to other duties, namely, that if we would hope for acceptance with God in our prayers and our alms, it is absolutely necessary to avoid outward pomp and ostentation. A prevailing desire of human applause, or as he expresses it, making it our chief end *to be seen of men*, will undoubtedly destroy the sincerity of religious works, so called, and cut off our claim to the Divine approbation. But if we perform our obedience only as unto our heavenly Father, with an affectionate sense upon our minds of his All-seeing eye observing us in secret, and with an upright intention to please him, he will accept of our service and *reward us openly*. Thus religion seated in the mind, and expressing itself by an uniform course of good actions, appears to be most reasonable and worthy of men, for it pursues the important design of obtaining God's favour, by the properest means. But on the other hand, if it be certain that God knows the secrets of all hearts, and will judge them, hypocrisy is

U 3

extreme

\* Matt. vi.

SERM. extreme folly, as well as wickedness. For what

IX.  good purpose can an insincere profession of piety serve, since we cannot hope to deceive him; or what rational account will a man be able to give of it to his own mind? Unless we will suppose the hypocrite persuaded that *God does not know*, and that *there is in the most high no knowledge* of man's actions, which probably is the case of very few, the worship which he performs with the greatest solemnity, and appearance of devotion, must appear to his reflecting thoughts, the most trifling and insignificant part of his conduct. It seems yet more absurd than the loud cries and extravagant rites of the priests of *Baal*, in that ridiculous light wherein the prophet *Elijah* elegantly sets them\*; for it is not less unreasonable to awake a sleeping God by clamour, or call him off from other business which he is supposed to be attending, than to address services to one whom we believe to be awake and attentive, yet without any design to obtain his approbation?

And not only should this consideration of the Divine Omniscience engage men to sincerity in their worship, but to universal purity of heart, and integrity in their whole conversation. For as all the parts of our moral conduct are equally under the direction of his law,

\* 1 Kings xix. 27.

law, which requires us to do justly, and to love mercy, as well as to walk humbly with God; and every work shall be brought into judgment before him, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil; so his eye is continually upon us in all the affairs of life, and in every other deliberation and design, as well as our immediate addresses to himself. In vain the \* eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, no eye shall see me, and disguiseth his face; and the murderer riseth with the light to kill the poor and needy, lurking as a thief in the night, till he find an opportunity to execute his villainous purposes. For tho' such wicked men may be able to hide their designs from the view of the world, and thereby escape with impunity in it, yet God is witness to their most secret devices, even to the mischief which they have meditated in their hearts, altho' their hands have never executed it, and he will discover it hereafter to their utter confusion.

2dly, Since it is God's prerogative to know the hearts of men and judge them, we should not presume to invade it by rash censures. Some works of men, both good and bad, are manifest, so that we cannot avoid passing a judgment upon them, tho' still it is an imperfect one, for we cannot enter into the secret springs

U 4

\* Job. xxiv. 15.

SERMON. springs and motives of action; but other works

IX. are altogether hid from our knowledge, and concerning them we ought not to \* judge before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man have praise of God, the praise which is justly due to his works. It is therefore with great reason that the apostles insist so much on this necessary caution to *Christians*, that they do not judge one another; which is not only becoming the deference they owe to the superior knowledge of their common master, and their professed expectation of appearing before his tribunal, but is the only foundation upon which charity and peace can subsist among them. It is the violation of this rule, and *Christians* adventuring to pronounce judgment upon their brethren, even upon the secrets of their hearts, censuring and casting them out of their fellowship as insincere in their religious profession, because of different sentiments and practices in matters confessedly not essential;—'tis this, I say, which has brought so great reproach on *Christianity*, and occasion'd such fierce and scandalous contentions among the followers of *Jesus Christ*. On the other hand, we ought not to be immoderately affected with the unjust censures which

\* 1 Cor. iv. 5.



which frail mortals may ignorantly pass upon us. Every man, 'tis true, desires to stand fair in the esteem of the world, and good men value reputation, even with the weak, as that whereby they are render'd the more capable of being useful to them; but still there is a sufficient consolation to the sincere against unjust reproaches, in the testimony of their own consciences, and the impartial unerring judgment of him who searches the heart. If the praise of wise and virtuous men be a support against the undeserved calumnies of the ignorant and the wicked, much more may he enjoy an undisturb'd tranquillity in his own breast, who having the approbation of his own mind, can securely appeal to an infallible witness, and leave his actions to be tried by the righteous Judge of the world, for to him *it is a very small thing to be judged of mens judgment, seeing he that judgeth justly is the Lord* \*. The last branch of the Divine perfect knowledge, to us incomprehensible, which shall be the subject of the

3<sup>d</sup> Observation, is prescience or foreknowledge of future events. That things to come, as well as the past and present, are known to the first intelligent Cause, is evident; for their being depends on his will, and all their powers are derived from him. He must therefore

\* 1 Cor. iv. 3.

SERM. fore foresee the utmost which those powers  
 IX. can produce, and cannot be ignorant of what  
 he intends himself to do. Every free agent  
 is conscious of his own intentions, which, if  
 there be not a defect of power, may infallibly  
 ascertain the event; but the *everlasting God*  
*fainteth not, nor is weary*; he is as able to ac-  
 complish his designs at the remotest distance  
 of time, as when they were first form'd, and  
 therefore *known to the Lord are all his works*  
*from the beginning*. As to the effects of ne-  
 cessary causes, we can easily conceive that he  
 foresees them, for they are, properly speaking,  
 his own works. As he is the first mover in the  
 material world, who by his wisdom originally  
 dispos'd its various parts, and by his active  
 power gave them all their force, he fore-  
 knows all the revolutions which can ever  
 happen in it, and all the productions which  
 can arise from it, for he is really the cause of  
 them, and they are to be attributed to his  
 continued operation. But that the free moral  
 actions of intelligent beings, of which them-  
 selves are the sole complete causes, depending  
 wholly on the determination of their wills,  
 and intirely imputed to them as their own;  
 that these should be foreseen by any under-  
 standing, must appear to us very wonderful,  
 because it is so far above the reach of human  
 knowledge,

knowledge, and because there appears in it to SERM.  
us, no particular ground of certainty, or man- IX.

ner of attaining it, consistent with the freedom of the agents, whose future actions are suppos'd to be known. But yet that it really is so, that not only God knows the present thoughts and intents of all mens hearts, but what they will do and incline to do, in all circumstances wherein they ever shall be, has been believed by the generality of mankind, who have thought seriously on this subject, to be included in the Divine Omniscience. It seems to be unworthy of his infinite perfection to place such a multitude of things, some of them very important, and on which great consequences depend, out of the reach of his foresight. And as from the Omnipresence of God, and the absolute dependance of all rational creatures upon him, so that their powers of liberty and choice, as well as others, are derived from him, and supported wholly by his providence, we justly infer that those powers cannot exert themselves in any manner without his present knowledge, which is as incomprehensible to us as Prescience itself; it seems reasonable to conclude, that since these foundations of his knowledge are immutable, and alike clearly understood by him from eternity, being really nothing else but his own  
perfections

SERM. perfections and operations, the object must be  
 IX. equally in his view at all times, and that he  
 must discern at once all the creatures, and the  
 intire series of their actions, during the whole  
 of their existence. Nay, the argument taken  
 from God's being the intelligent Cause and  
 supreme Ruler of all things, to prove that he  
 knows the whole of actual existence, and  
 whatever is done within its compass, in which  
 all the operations of rational beings are inclu-  
 ded; this argument concludes as strongly for  
 the same extent of his absolute eternal Pre-  
 science. For if the intire frame of nature now  
 actually in being, and the intire scheme of  
 providence, which he is now carrying on,  
 comprehending the whole series of events; if  
 these be the works of design, they must have  
 been known before they began to be; and it  
 is absurd, that powers wholly derived from,  
 and absolutely depending on a wise Author,  
 for ends which he intended, should not be  
 foreseen by him, with all their exercises and  
 all their possible productions. I shall not in-  
 sist on it as a proof of this doctrine, that there  
 have been prophecies fulfill'd of future e-  
 vents, which depended on the choice of free  
 agents; not only believed by the weak and  
 superstitious vulgar, but by men of the best  
 understanding, upon clear historical evidence;  
 such

such as the famous prediction of *Isaiab* concerning the great revolution in the *Eastern* monarchy, which was translated from *Babylon* to *Persia*, and particularly concerning *Cyrus*, whom the prophet expressly names long before he was born, describing his memorable acts, and the favour granted by him to the *Jews*; nor the yet more illustrious example of our Saviour's death, foretold as fix'd in the *determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, tho' by wicked hands he was crucified and slain. Altho' no reason can be assigned why, if the Divine Prescience extends to these cases, wherein men have acted their part as freely as in any other, the same Prescience may not be supposed equally to extend to all parallel cases, that is, to all the voluntary actions of men, and all the events which are accomplished by them. But, not to insist at present on arguments taken from revelation, however convincing they may appear to be, it would seem that if we only acknowledge the universal dominion of the supreme Being over the world, and his moral government over his rational creatures, the freest actions of men, and all other moral agents, are foreseen by him, otherwise there must be an uncertainty in the measures of his own administration. As the distribution of rewards and punishments



SERM. punishments is a very eminent part of his go-

IX. vernment, in which the honour of his Majesty, and his moral perfections, is nearly concerned, and which is attended with the most remarkable changes in the state of the world, it must be unforeknown to himself in particular, with all the consequences of it, if the behaviour of rational creatures, to which it bears an exact proportion, is unforeknown. But this is a supposition which we can hardly think consistent with the glory of his absolute supremacy, the perfection of his wisdom, and the immutability of his counsels.

But the great difficulty, which I hinted before, is concerning the consistency of this infallible Divine Prescience, with the liberty of human actions. If God knows all future events certainly, and it is impossible any thing, particularly any action, should not come to pass which he foresees, and in the manner in which he foresees it, how then are these actions free? The answer is, that foreknowledge has no influence at all upon the nature of things, to make the least alteration in them. The events which are necessary are foreknown as necessary, and those which are contingent and voluntary, are foreknown no otherwise than as contingent and voluntary. As our knowledge of things present, be it ever so certain,

tain, does not affect their condition or manner of being; the mechanical motions of bodies are alike necessary, and the moral actions of men are alike free, whether we know them or not; and our foreknowledge of these different sorts of events, supposing we had it, could affect them no more than our knowledge of them when present; so neither has the simple Divine Prescience any kind of causality in the production, or does at all affect the nature and kind of events which are the objects of it. The foresight men have of their future actions in certain circumstances, does not in the least degree lessen their liberty, nor does God's foreknowledge of his own actions make him the less free; no more is there any reason to imagine that his Prescience of what other agents will do, impairs their freedom. We are conscious to ourselves of all the liberty in action, which we can think essentially requisite to the purposes of morality; we know that we are under no constraint in doing good or evil, but that our choice and refusal of the one or the other, proceeds from our own affections and the inward determination of our own minds, and this is the foundation of the inward self-condemnings and self-approbations which we feel; and as the knowledge which God has of our actions, whether present

SERM. present or future, is what we are not conscious of, nor find any influence of it upon our self-determining and active powers; so it does not really change their nature or quality, making them more or less free.

## IX.

As to the manner of God's foreknowing certainly contingent future events, that is, which have no necessary cause, nor are to be accomplished by his own power, and the determination of his will, but produced by other free agents; this seems to be incomprehensible by the human understanding. That any mind should foresee with certainty a distant event, which does not necessarily proceed from the nature of things, nor is fixed by the purpose of a voluntary agent, is wonderful to us and far surpasses our conception. For as our knowledge of futurity can only rest on one or other of these foundations, we can form no distinct notion of any foreknowledge without them. It is probably their apprehending the Divine Prescience after the same manner, and limiting it to the same grounds, which has occasion'd so much perplexity in the minds of men, and involv'd their speculations upon this subject in so much confusion. Some imagining that contingent events could not otherwise be so ascertain'd, as to be infallibly known, have suppos'd peremptory eternal decrees concerning

cerning all of them, even the freest actions of SERM.  
men; and not only so, but a previous Divine IX.  
influence on the active powers of rational  
creatures, exciting them to action: But o-  
thers judging this to be utterly inconsistent  
with human liberty, and, with respect to evil  
actions, inconsistent with the purity and good-  
ness of the Divine nature, yet still adhering  
to the same limited foundation of foreknow-  
ledge, have denied the doctrine of Prescience  
altogether, or doubted concerning it. I believe  
the best way for us to get rid of these difficul-  
ties, is wholly to neglect the hypotheses,  
which have been invented to account for the  
manner of the Divine Prescience, acknow-  
ledging that it is to us inexplicable, and yet  
concluding that this is no sufficient objection  
against a doctrine, otherwise well confirmed.  
The futurity of contingent events is real, tho'  
we cannot tell the cause of it, or upon what  
grounds it is to be known. A free action  
now done, was yesterday, or in any preceding  
point of duration, as truly future, as it has to-  
day actually come to pass; therefore it is not  
impossible, (for our minds can discern no con-  
tradiction in it) that an infinite understanding  
should foreknow such events, tho' that know-  
ledge is *too high for us*, or perhaps any finite  
mind, *we cannot attain to it*. And here we

SERM. may safely rest, as we find ourselves obliged

IX. to do in our inquiries concerning the other  
 { perfections of God, which are evidently prov'd  
 to belong to his nature, and therefore be-  
 lieved, tho' to us incomprehensible. We ac-  
 knowledge his Omnipresence, Eternity, Self-  
 existence and Omnipotence; yet the nature  
 of these attributes, and the manner of their  
 being, particularly the exercise of the last-  
 mentioned, his power in creating things out  
 of nothing, as much exceeds our compre-  
 hension as his foreknowledge of future con-  
 tingencies. We cannot indeed believe con-  
 tradictions, and to impose them upon us, is  
 to affront the rational nature; but it is no ab-  
 surdity to believe the existence and the pro-  
 perties of a being, whom *we cannot by search-  
 ing find out, nor understand to perfection.*

This particular branch of God's Omni-  
 science, gives us a very high idea of him, as  
 the proper object of our adoration. How  
 wonderful, how much to be esteemed for its  
 perfection, is that understanding, which not  
 only sees distinctly all the past and present ac-  
 tions and thoughts of all intelligent beings,  
 but those which are yet future, and discerns,  
 even at the greatest distance of duration, all  
 the productions of free as well as necessary  
 causes? What can be hid from him *who un-  
 derstandeth*



*derstandeth our very thoughts afar off?* Surely SERM.  
IX.  
no darkness can cover any thing from his sight. How despicable are the idols of the nations *who have eyes and see not, ears and bear not,* and who know not, and cannot declare things to come? How infatuated are their worshippers? How unhappy as well as inexcusable are they, who acknowledge no other God than chance or necessity? For what satisfaction can an intelligent being have in a world, supposed to be under no intelligent direction, but the course of things hurried on in it by giddy fortune, or irresistible fate, equally unknowing of futurity? On the contrary, the sincere servants of the true and living God have this never-failing consolation, that however ignorant they are of what is to come, concerning which their minds are naturally anxious, he sees the end from the beginning, and no event can possibly surprise him; for even the freest purposes of men, and all other rational agents, were known in his eternal counsels, and the issues of them comprehended in the fore-appointed scheme of his administration.

2dly, As this knowledge is peculiar to God, necessarily arising from the infinite perfection of his nature, and no finite mind can attain to any part of it with certainty, otherwise

SERM. than by communication from him, he has

IX. wisely hid it from men, that they may learn  
 to trust his providence with absolute resignation. We are not to form our schemes in life, and take the measures of our conduct, by a discernment of particular future events, (for they are cover'd from our sight under impenetrable darkness) but by general laws which God has given us, and by our observations on the ordinary course of things. No man can be sure of success, *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*, the best concerted projects are liable to a multitude of accidents which do not fall within the reach of our foresight. But this ought to give us contentment, and here we ought to rest with pleasure, that the wise and good God knows all things; and having done what was on our part reasonable, we may safely *commit our way and our work* to him, leaving the direction of events to his providence. Nor ought we to pry too curiously into futurity, which God has concealed from us. This is an error which weak and distrustful minds are apt to fall into. The *Gentiles* were not so inexcusable in it, *who knew not God*; but for *Christians* to apply themselves to such as practise the arts of necromancy and divination, for revealing secrets and foretelling things to come,

is to expose themselves as a prey to impostors, SERM.  
and to dishonour the true God, who has fa- IX.  
voured them with a clear manifestation of  
himself, by attributing to dæmons and their  
pretended agents, that knowledge which pec-  
uliarly belongs to him. And,

*Lastly, Let us take no thought for to-mor-  
row, for our heavenly Father knows what we  
need; he knows what is best, and what the  
event of things will be. And let us not boast  
of to-morrow, nor be vainly puff'd up, with  
any expectations in this world, for God only  
knows, we know not, what a day, or any  
future time, may bring forth.*

# SERMON X.

The Wisdom of God manifested in  
the Constitution and Government,  
both of the natural and moral  
World.

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1 Tim. i. 17.

*Unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible,  
the only wise God, be honour and glory for  
ever and ever.*

SERM. X. **I**T is evident beyond all rational contra-  
diction, that the world was made, and  
is governed by design; and that the appear-  
ances of nature, and the series of events, which  
every one may observe, cannot be accounted  
for without supposing intelligence in the  
universal Cause. But there is a difference  
between understanding and wisdom, as be-  
tween a power, or faculty, and the right use  
of it. Understanding is the fundamental  
capacity of wisdom, and wisdom is the pro-  
per exercise and improvement of understand-  
ing.

ing. Our own experience, and our observa-  
tions upon the conduct of mankind, lead us  
to distinguish between acting with design  
and acting wisely; the *former* is the charac-  
ter of all rational agents, but, alas! we have  
too good reason to know that the *latter* does  
not always accompany it: And wisdom ad-  
mits of various degrees; the inequality arising  
from several causes; either an unequal mea-  
sure of knowledge, for according to our dis-  
cernment of the reason of things, their rela-  
tions, connexions and dependencies, so must  
our conduct be wise or unwise; or from the  
motives which influence the springs of ac-  
tion. We find in ourselves a variety of af-  
fections, which prompt us to act, prevent-  
ing deliberate attention. Men do not always  
govern themselves according to the dictates  
of cool reason, and pursue the measures  
which themselves know, or believe to be the  
best, but are often bias'd by prejudices, and  
misled by their particular propensities, to do  
what their own minds do not approve.  
Therefore knowledge and wisdom are differ-  
ent qualities, and they must be considered  
as distinct attributes in the Deity; though in  
him, as may be afterwards observ'd, the one  
is justly infer'd from the other; and the same

SERM.  
X.



SERM. arguments which prove his intelligence in ge-

X. neral, prove him also to be wise.

Wisdom in any agent is estimated by his approbation of such ends, as in the judgment of the person forming the estimation, are most suitable to his nature, and an invariable pursuit of those ends by the best and most effectual methods. It is, first of all, absolutely necessary that a right design be propos'd, else no scheme of action can possibly obtain our esteem as wise, or intitle the agent to that character. If we see a man ever so ingenious about trifles, and contriving methods which have the greatest aptitude to accomplish low ends, and unworthy of his rational nature, this can never raise any veneration for him in our hearts, nay, we shall pronounce all his contrivances foolish. Now concerning ends, 'tis plain that to us they are determin'd by our affections; and the measure of them, I mean the rule whereby we judge whether they be good or bad, right or wrong, is no other than our own approbation. Subordinate ends are only considered as means, and derive their value from the higher purposes which they serve; and ultimate ends to the human mind are either private happiness, or the good of others, to the pursuit of which we are determined by self-love and benevolence, the  
general

general governing springs of action in our nature ; 'tis the actions only which ultimately terminate in those ends, or which have a tendency to promote them, that we pronounce wise. The man who takes the measures, and steddily adheres to them which have the strictest connexion, not with the gratification of a particular appetite or passion, but his own true, most extensive and complete felicity, or with the greatest public good, is to be acknowledged a wise man ; he who acts upon lower and inconsistent views, does not merit that character.

But the question is, how shall we judge concerning the ends of the Deity, so as with understanding to pronounce him wise ? Can we pretend to know what is or is not becoming the dignity and perfection of his nature ? Or, shall we make the instincts planted in our minds for the particular purposes of our being, a standard whereby to examine his actions, and pass a judgment upon them ? I answer, that tho' indeed the Divine excellencies infinitely surpass our understanding, and we cannot take upon us to judge, as from a complete knowledge of them, what views they may require to be pursued ; yet there are some things which we cannot possibly help thinking worthy of every intelligent nature.

SERM. Our minds are so constituted that we necessarily approve and admire goodness; and the Being who appears in his counsels to have intended, and by his actions to promote the most extensive happiness of other beings which are capable of it, we must judge to have the first and essentially requisite qualification of a wise agent. Again, tho' we have not such a knowledge of the Divine perfections, and of the nature and reason of things, as to qualify us for judging, *à priori*, what is fittest for him to do; yet by observing the mutual relations and harmony of things which he has made, and the aptitude of some, as means, to answer others as the ends of them, we may collect, what in fact he did intend, and thereby discern the wisdom of the whole constitution. It is impossible indeed for any finite understanding to penetrate into the depths of his designs, or take in the intire scheme of his administration. We know not what remote and very important purposes may be serv'd by his works, beyond all the views which fall under our observation; *for who hath known the mind of the Lord, and who hath been his counsellor?* But even by such a partial observation as our limited capacity can reach to, we may be able to trace the marks of excellent understanding in some of the ways of God, and from

from thence reasonably conclude, that perfect wisdom governs the whole. For example, the Divine government over mankind, and the methods of providence towards them, may have a relation to the universe, and affect other orders of intelligent beings in a manner which we cannot comprehend; but considering it abstractly, and as intire in itself, without any such relation, which is our way of conceiving, it may appear to us wise, and worthy of the most excellent Being.

2dly, Wisdom consists in the choice and the use of proper means for accomplishing good ends. Supposing an agent to have very right intentions, which is so far praise-worthy, yet it shews a defect of understanding, if he fails in the execution, by chusing means which are not fit. And it is this which is principally meant by wisdom, so far as it denotes an intellectual ability. For to the ends which they pursue, moral agents are determin'd by their affections; but in the choice of means their understanding only can direct. Therefore imperfect minds which do not comprehend all the relations and connexions of things, and do not foresee all future events, must be deficient in wisdom, tho' without any fault in a moral sense; and the character of wise must be appropriated to God as it is in

SERM. in the text; for *he is only wise*, having a per-

X. *perfect knowledge of every thing which shall ever come to pass, and which any power will, or can possibly produce.* It is elegantly said in the book of *Job*, *he putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly*\*: Their understandings, tho' vastly large, are not infinite; their great natural capacity is improved to a very high measure of knowledge, by their standing always in the presence of God, and receiving his instructions. Yet it is insufficient for the government of the world, and the direction of its affairs, which God hath reserved in his own hands; committing nothing to the contrivance of his ablest ministers, (they are only employ'd to execute his orders) because of their imperfection in wisdom.

In this sense, the perfect wisdom of God is necessarily infer'd from the other absolute perfections of his nature. If he be every where present, and wherever he is present there is activity which cannot be resisted, and intelligence which cannot be mislead or impos'd upon:—if he is absolutely Omniscient, knowing not only all things which now are, with the greatest exactness, even the most secret thoughts of intelligent beings, but also all things

\* Job iv. 18.



things which shall be produced, whether by SERM.  
 necessary or free causes; it follows, that he X.

can never possibly be mistaken in his measures, or come short of a right judgment upon the expediency of things, or the fitness of means for attaining the ends he proposes. Since his power is infinite and cannot be controul'd, nor his designs defeated by any opposition, and there is no imaginable cause which should induce him to alter his designs, \* *but his counsel standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations*; since it is so, nothing can be wanting to the highest perfection of wisdom; no weakness, no error, no irresolution or unsteadiness can ever be charg'd on any of his measures. Such is the rashness and folly of poor short-sighted mortals, that they take upon them to censure the works of God as defective in wisdom, altho' we have not only the same evidence of this which is common to other of his attributes, that is; we know it by its fruits and effects; but supposing his other perfections to be prov'd, his knowledge, and his power, and his omnipresence, we are satisfied before-hand by reasoning which is fully convincing, without considering his works of creation and providence which abundantly display his wisdom; we

are

\* Psal. xxxiii. 11.

SERM. are satisfied, I say, that he is, and necessarily  
 X. must be infinitely wise.

Another general argument to prove the wisdom of God, is taken from the faint and imperfect images of it which are in some of the creatures, and which must be deriv'd from the *father of lights*, himself therefore possess'd of that perfection in the highest degree. As intelligence in the effect is a clear evidence of it in the Author, tho' of a superior kind, (for it could not possibly proceed from an unintelligent Cause;) so particularly, the highest improvement, and the best use of understanding can never exceed, nor indeed equal the original Fountain from which all knowledge flows; and therefore the wisdom of God is absolutely supreme. Since God only hath *put wisdom into the inward parts, and given understanding to the heart*, all the measures of wisdom which any created and finite beings can attain to, must needs be inferior to his. For, the effect can neither originally have, nor ever possibly arrive to the perfection of the voluntary complete cause. If it could, then of that equal, and therefore independent perfection, or degree of perfection, it would be a cause to itself, rather there would be no cause at all. Tho' 'tis true *this* is an improveable ability in imperfect minds, which grow in wisdom

wisdom by attention, industrious inquiry, and S E R M.  
careful observation, yet never independently X.  
on God, nor can their acquirements rise to an  
equality with the Divine understanding. For  
the very capacity of improvement is derived  
from him, the means are under the direction  
of his providence, and the success depends on  
his good pleasure. And the increase, as it is  
limited in its degrees, by the will of him who  
hath determin'd the measures of perfection to  
which every one of his creatures shall, or can  
attain, so it implies an imperfection from  
which the first Cause is absolutely free, whose  
wisdom, as all the other excellencies of his  
nature, is incapable of any addition or dimi-  
nution.

But the most obvious proof of the wisdom  
of God, and to attentive minds it is fully  
convincing, is, by his works of creation and  
providence; his originally making all things  
in heaven and earth, and disposing them in  
the order in which they appear; his preserv-  
ing them all and governing them, in the way  
which is most suitable to their several na-  
tures, and so as they may best answer the  
ends of their being. They are made so as  
to have a visible mutual relation to each o-  
ther, with the most exquisite skill and con-  
trivance, and plainly to discover that the  
whole

SERM. whole is under the direction of one ruling

X. Counsel. Inanimate things are upheld by the power of God, and directed in their motions, constantly and uniformly, to serve particular purposes. Sensitive beings have a suitable provision made for the support of their lives, and are govern'd by instincts which determine them to pursue the proper ends of their nature. And rational agents have laws given them for regulating their conduct, and they are furnished with proper motives of action, by the influence of which they are directed, freely, and with understanding to pursue the proper ends of their being. Upon a general survey of these works of God, there appears an obvious congruity in the whole, and a designed subserviency of some to others. It is evident, that the motions of the heavenly bodies, and the constant uniform influence of them in the various productions upon our globe, are under such a direction as to answer the end of sustaining a multitude of living things in their regular successions; animals are under an apparent œconomy, whereby they are render'd useful to one another, and all of them subordinated to man. Now, I say, even upon such a slight and general view, we have a clear discovery of infinite Divine wisdom. The greater variety there is in any system,

system, which must all be within the com-  
prehension of the mind that form'd it, pro-  
vided there appears unity of design and regu-  
lar contrivance, the larger still we must con-  
clude the understanding to be. A narrow ca-  
pacity reaches only to a few things, placing  
them in due order; if a great multitude be put  
under its care, it is embarrass'd and thrown  
into confusion. But how vast is the compre-  
hension of that providence which takes under  
its guidance the whole heavens and the earth,  
with all things that are in them, which con-  
ducts the motions of the celestial orbs, yet  
without neglecting the meanest animal or ve-  
getable on this earth; and so adjusts all the  
parts of the stupendous fabric, that whatever  
changes any of them may undergo, their cor-  
respondence to each other is uniformly main-  
tained, and the harmony of the whole.

SERM.  
X.

Especially the variety of kinds, yet more  
than the multitude of individuals, properly  
disposed, demonstrates the wisdom of the  
Creator and supreme Governor of the world.  
There is no diversity at all in the productions  
of necessary unintelligent causes; and, in pro-  
portion to their measure of understanding, the  
operations of free agents are confin'd to a few  
similar effects, or extend to a greater variety.  
It is thus that we estimate a human genius;



SERM. the man who is skill'd in many different  
 X. branches of learning, in history, in languages,  
 in politics and philosophy, or who knows  
 how to act a proper part in very different stations of life, is reputed wiser than he whose knowledge is confined to a few particulars. But how adorable is that wisdom which has displayed itself marvelously in the whole gradation of being; which shines conspicuously, not only adjusting with the utmost exactness, the mechanism of the material world, but has formed intirely different and superior kinds, namely spirits, to whose nature and condition of being the methods of his providence are as well accommodated as to the other. The constitution and form of government under which intelligent creatures are plac'd, is, at least, as clear a manifestation of the Divine wisdom, as the frame and direction of the corporeal system. And, which is most worthy of our observation to the present purpose, these essentially different kinds are most conveniently disposed of, with relation to each other. Spirit and body are united in the human composition; and as the system is distinguished in its formation by the Creator's skill, it is as much distinguished by the administration of his providence. From man there is a descent, I mean as to the degrees of  
 their

their perfection, in the works of God which we are best acquainted with. The next inferior rank are the brutal species, and among them a beautiful variety, some making a much more considerable figure than others in the animal kingdom; some more eminently useful, and even making nearer approaches to the human understanding. From them the perfection of the animal life lessens by various descending degrees, till it comes so near the vegetable world as scarcely to be distinguished. Of vegetables there are as various kinds, all of them ministring to sensitive beings as a superior order, and these latter are directed to the proper use of them by particular instincts: And inanimate things are constantly so governed as to serve the purpose of producing the several sorts of herbs, trees and fruits. This order is maintained amidst an infinite diversity; and as there is a scale of being appointed by the great designing Author, so there is a subordination of use, the lower still serving the higher, till we ascend to man, the chief of the works of God in our world. Who that attends to this obvious face of nature, and the daily administration of providence, can help acknowledging not only design, that is, the being of God, but perfectly wise counsel, discovered in the admirable

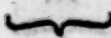
SERM. œconomy of all things, as far as his works  
 X. come within our knowledge?

A more particular and accurate inquiry into all these things, would set the evidence of Divine wisdom still in a clearer and stronger light; shewing not only that the universe, considered as one intire work, discovers wonderful counsel in the constitution of it, having all its parts for several uses regularly disposed and fitted to each other; but every particular being which can be considered as a separate intire system and compleat in itself, carries in its frame the clearest manifestations of its Author's perfect understanding. Not only *the Lord by wisdom stretched out the heavens, and established the earth by his discretion*, but in the constitution of every single terrestrial and celestial body, is manifested the exquisite skill of their designing intelligent Maker. As to the celestial, they are too far distant for our minute observation; and human science is principally conversant about their magnitude, distance and regular motions, in which the modern improvements of astronomical learning open a surprising scene, displaying the wisdom of God beyond what appears to the first views of an uninstructed spectator. In the composition of bodies whose properties are better known to us, as air, water, earth, stones,

stones, minerals, vegetables of every kind, SERM.  
 animals, and especially the human body;—in X.  
 all of these and each of them, the manifold  
 wisdom of the Creator is discovered. And  
 here also it is worthy of our observation, that  
 the progress of learning has most eminently  
 tended to establish the foundations of religion;  
 for the discoveries which have lately been  
 made in natural history, philosophy and ana-  
 tomy, have greatly illustrated and confirmed  
 this important article we are now considering.  
 It is not convenient in this short discourse to  
 descend to particulars, even which are com-  
 monly known. But this I may safely say,  
 that it shows an amazing infatuation in any  
 man, who has not spent his life in the utmost  
 obscurity, intirely unacquainted with that  
 knowledge of nature which is the subject of  
 common conversation in this age and these  
 parts of the world, not to be convinc'd, that  
 as the works of God are *manifold*, so in *wis-*  
*dom he has made them all*, and particularly  
 that the human body is *fearfully and won-*  
*derfully made*.

If we proceed farther to consider man in  
 his better part, which God made *after his own*  
*image*, the workmanship will appear in a pe-  
 culiar manner, worthy of the Author's per-  
 fect understanding. And first of all, let us

SERM. observe our situation in the universe. We are

X.  nearly allied and closely united to the corporeal world, a part of matter fitly organized to convey the notices of external things, and to be the mind's instrument of action, is a part of ourselves. Is not wisdom manifested in placing rational capacities thus conveniently for contemplation, and for the proper improvement of them in a rational happiness, which especially arises from adoring, and actively shewing the praises of the Almighty, All-wise and bountiful Creator? Since this earth is such a beautiful fabric, so curiously fram'd and adorn'd, and all God's works in it, even those which are unintelligent, praise him in a silent way, by giving to rational beings an occasion of observing and admiring his perfections manifested in them, can we help thinking it was worthy of the wise Author, nay, does it not appear to be the finishing excellence of such a work, to furnish it with understanding inhabitants, fitted with proper powers and affections for enjoying it, capable of discerning its various beauty, and applying it to the delightful purpose of celebrating his praise? This honourable province is therefore wisely assigned to man, as he is qualify'd for it by the faculties of his nature, and



and holds the first rank in this lower visible SERM.  
part of the creation. X.

But if we consider the human constitution by itself, it will appear to be the finish'd production of a wise Author. To judge of this it is necessary to have in view the ends of our being, which obviously arise from the very frame of our nature. Man is a compound of body and spirit; by the former of which he has a necessary relation to the material world, which is the first appointed stage of his existence; his life, consider'd as an animated system of matter, is nourished by the productions of the earth, and the necessities of his animal nature employ the cares of his mind. The other part, the spirit, is endued with nobler powers, and is capable of higher enjoyments, of the pleasures of virtue, of self-approbation, and the favour of God, which are wholly independent on the body. These ends, as different as the essences of soul and body, are united in our constitution, and may be jointly pursu'd without confusion. For the purposes both of the animal and rational life we are fitted with proper faculties, instincts and affections: We have senses whereby are communicated to us such ideas of external objects as are useful to the animal nature, and likewise the materials of entertaining know-

SERM. ledge to the mind: We have appetites directing  
X. and prompting us to the use of those things  
which are the means of preserving the present life, and of such happiness as it is capable of, without being left wholly to the conduct of calm reason, which would be too weak to answer the end sufficiently, and by attending such affairs would be too much diverted from more important employments. And particularly, in considering the animal part of the human life, it can hardly escape our observation, that provident nature has shewn her wise care for the species, by planting in the individuals instincts which powerfully determine them to pursue its general interests, tho' often accompanied with great labour, anxiety and pain. The superior part in our composition, the spirit, is made for nobler ends, and is qualified to pursue them by nobler faculties, affections and determinations: It has understanding, liberty, choice, an instinct of benevolence as well as self-love, and conscience, whereby it judges of its own dispositions and actions according to a deeply engraven and invariable sense of good and evil, from the consciousness of which different moral qualities in itself, arises the most solid inward joy, or the most painful reflexion. These powers appear to our own minds to have

have a very great excellence in them, and to SERM.  
dignify us highly above other beings in the X.

world about us; and the regular exercise of them leads to a great, perpetually increasing happiness, to the pursuit of which we are directed by attending to our own frame. The understanding is a faculty which points to its own proper use and improvement; not only directing the exercise of all our other powers, but affording itself an eminent pleasure, far superior to all sensual gratifications. Liberty, tho' in us unavoidably accompanied with a possibility of doing wrong, yet is absolutely necessary to our doing right in a moral sense, from which the highest satisfaction arises in the mind. It is virtue which raises our nature to the greatest perfection it can attain to; and what stronger inducement can there be to the practice of it, than, what is inseparable from our very constitution, the joy of self-approbation which naturally flows from it, and the self-reproach which necessarily follows the contrary? And as the human mind is naturally solicitous about futurity, another state of existence is the subject of its prefiguring thoughts, and its earnest desires extend even to immortality, which, together with the scanty measure of its attainments here, both in knowledge and enjoyment, far  
below

SERM. below what its faculties are capable of, and  
 X. seem to be designed for; is at least a probable  
 argument that it is designed to subsist hereafter. That same consciousness of integrity or moral goodness, which affords the truest present tranquillity and satisfaction to the mind, gives it also confidence towards God as the righteous Judge of the world, rendering it secure in the expectation of all changes which he shall appoint.

If we descend to a more particular consideration of the laws of nature, we shall find that they are every way worthy of a wise Law-giver, as having a certain connexion with the ends of his own constitution, and of our being. The virtue of sobriety, a very important part of the law written in our hearts, evidently tends to the preservation and the easy enjoyment of life, and to the more vigorous exercise of our superior powers and affections. The fear of God, as it is our wisdom, the injunction of it shews the wisdom of the natural laws; for it improves the mind, and yields it the most delightful entertainment; and it secures the practice of every other virtue: And charity is *the perfect bond* of human society; fit therefore to be prescribed by that gracious Governor whose care extends to all mankind, and who by thus providing

providing for the common safety has wisely SERM.  
promoted, instead of diminishing the happi- X.  
ness of every individual ; for the truest con-  
tentment of mind accompanies an universal,  
undissembled good-will. Thus all the works  
of God have the evidences of his wisdom  
clearly stamp'd upon them, whether we view  
them in the whole or in parts, and the more  
diligently we apply ourselves to this inquiry,  
the more we shall be satisfied that the cha-  
racter of *only wise*, justly belongs to him.

Another illustration of this subject is taken  
from the manner of the Divine operations,  
which are so contrived that a vast multitude  
of effects depend on one or a few causes. This  
is always regarded as an excellency in any  
work, which still appears the more beautiful,  
manifesting the capacity of the Author, the  
more various its regular appearances are, and  
the greater simplicity there is in the manner  
of producing them. When every several ef-  
fect has a particular separate cause, this gives  
no pleasure to the spectator, as not discover-  
ing contrivance. But that work is beheld with  
admiration and delight, as the result of deep  
counsel, which is complicated in its parts, and  
yet simple in its operation, where a great va-  
riety of effects are seen to arise from one prin-  
ciple operating uniformly. That this is the  
true



SERM. true character of the works of God, we

X. shall be satisfied by considering the natural and the moral world ; in both which a vast diversity of appearances depend upon single causes. The best explication which has yet been given of the great phænomena in the mundane system, resolves them into attraction and gravitation ; that is, a force impress'd on all bodies whereby they mutually attract, or tend towards each other, according to the quantity of matter they contain, and in proportion to their distances. It is this which accounts for the regular motion of the planets, so necessary to the beauty and order of the visible world ; for the pressure of the air, so useful to the preservation of the animal life ; for the ascent of vapours from the earth and the waters, and their descent when collected and condensed, in refreshing rains ; for the perpetual flux of rivers ; for the ebbing and flowing of the sea ; and for the stability of the earth, supporting innumerable living creatures, with all convenient furniture for their accommodation ; and it is the foundation of all human mechanical arts, without which life would not be tolerable. But this simple cause, productive of so many important appearances in nature, must be attributed to God the first mover, as his work ; for it is

not to be explained without having recourse SERM.  
to his power and will. It is evidently an ac- X.  
tive force, and therefore cannot be ascrib'd to  
matter which is wholly and essentially unac-  
tive; and whatever appearance of action it  
has, can only be by the contact of its super-  
ficial parts; whereas the force of gravity pe-  
netrates to the centers of all bodies, and af-  
fects them at the greatest distance. Either  
therefore it must be the immediate operation  
of the first Cause himself, or of an inferior  
agent by his direction, acting constantly and  
uniformly on every part of corporeal nature.  
Other instances might be given, to shew that  
the material world is govern'd by the influ-  
ence of single causes producing a great di-  
versity of effects, according to the different  
nature of the subjects they work upon; as in  
the general laws of motion, the various ope-  
rations of fire, the almost numberless effects  
which depend upon the constant unvaried na-  
ture and properties of water, and many  
more. But that of gravity mention'd before,  
is the most universal that we know, and the  
most satisfying to inquisitive minds; as to a  
careful attention to it, and diligent observa-  
tion of its effects, are owing the greatest mo-  
dern improvements in natural philosophy, all  
directly leading to this conclusion, that God  
himself,

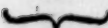
SERM. himself, by his own interposition, wisely and  
 X. constantly guides, what is commonly called  
 the course of nature.

I shall not insist on the principal appearances of the animal life, which are not to be attributed to mechanism, depending on gravity, tho' some have vainly attempted to account for them that way. This however may be observed concerning them, that they seem to be laid on one general uniform foundation. As there are common mediums by which the images or impressions of material objects are conveyed to sensitive beings, so the perceptions raised in them which are similar, as far as we can judge, not arising from the nature of things, (for no man can account for the particular sensations in animals from the figure and other primary qualities, or from the motion of the bodies which occasion them;) they must proceed from a general law of nature, or, which means the same thing, the uniform operation of the first supreme Cause. In the same manner, the instincts and appetites of animals, determining them by a short and easy method to use the necessary means of their own preservation, and of such enjoyment as they are capable of, must be resolved into the uniform direction of nature, caring for its own works.

But

But the moral world is the chief of God's SERM.  
works which we know, wherein his wisdom X.  
is principally display'd, and the same character of simplicity, may be justly applied to the constitution by which *it* is govern'd. The main ends of it are the perfection and happiness of intelligent beings, ends most worthy of supreme Goodness; but it is the province of wisdom to direct the means by which they shall be obtain'd. Now to this purpose, the great Author of nature has not given a separate rule to every individual, whereby it should be directed to pursue its own interest independently on all others; but together with self-love, wisely implanted in every one in order to provide for private happiness, has united them under the general law of benevolence, which attracts free agents into a beautiful harmonious society, as by the force of gravity bodies are united into a regular connected system. What could be better contriv'd to preserve the common peace, and promote the common felicity of a multitude, than to charge every one with the care of his fellows, and make his own happiness depend upon it? And tho' the perfect happiness of mankind in the first stage of their existence is not actually attain'd, that is no argument against the Wisdom of the constitution, nor proves that the Author's  
intention

SERM. intention is frustrated. For as in many other

X.  productions of nature, especially in every kind of life, there is a gradual progress, which when compleated, is in the whole kind an admirable instance of the Creator's wise design, tho' during the increase but imperfectly discern'd, and many of the individuals never arrive to it; so the principles planted in the human mind, tending to its own and the common happiness, do not produce their proper effect in some individuals, through their own fault, and not their full effect in the whole of the present state, being a state of appointed imperfection; but they produce even now, such a measure of happiness as is sufficient to justify the wisdom of God in the constitution: And the same Principles rais'd to higher perfection in another state, will, by a more powerful operation fully answering their end in the complete happiness of all and every one, more illustriously manifest the infinite understanding, as well as goodness of the supreme Being.

As self-love and benevolence, or the desire of private and public happiness, are not barely enjoin'd by the authority of a Law-giver, but the affections themselves are planted in the heart of every individual, determining them all, as far as free agents in such a state could



could properly be determined, whereby the whole species are wisely directed to pursue the true ends of their being; so these two principles are intended to controul and regulate the exercise of all other affections and passions. It was necessary that the human nature should be furnish'd with inferior private appetites and passions for the purposes of the animal life, and likewise with particular instincts of the public kind, such as compassion, gratitude and natural affection, where nearer attachments and pressing circumstances require a more vigorous and speedy interposal by kind offices, in behalf of some of mankind, than of others; which is evidently serviceable to, and ordained for the public good. But the universal principles of dispassionate self-love and benevolence have properly the supremacy in our minds, to moderate the lower springs of action belonging to their several kinds, and to prevent their excesses. If lower selfish desires hurry us with too great violence, they are reasonably restrained by calm self-love to the whole of our true interest. If particular instincts determining us to relieve and communicate pleasure to others carry us at any time beyond their just measure, which is the case with minds in which compassion and natural affection are very strong, they are check'd

SERM. by a calm consideration of the most public

X. good, which is the governing virtuous principle. And now upon a deliberate view of this whole constitution, as design'd by the Author of nature, must it not be acknowledged that wisdom appears in it? Supposing the intention to be the happiness of mankind, the greatest happiness they are capable of, what could be more wisely contrived for answering the end? These general plain laws universally complied with, and having their full effect, would raise the human nature to its highest perfection, and spread united joy and felicity over the whole kind; and they are made easy to every man by being the dictates of his own mind, and we are prompted to obey them by inclination. And whereas our present condition of being is such as required a variety of particular instincts and determinations to render it the more comfortable, and defend us from some inconveniencies we are liable to, from which variety there might arise an occasion of perplexity in our conduct, by the interfering springs of action; the great ruling principles are always ready at hand, to be applied in every case for our direction.

Perhaps it may be alledg'd, that the proof of the wisdom of God in his works, which has been last insisted on, namely, *that* taken from

from this consideration, that a vast multitude of effects depends on one, or a few causes; SERM.  
X.

that this, I say, is not conclusive, because we cannot be absolutely certain that it is a method of operation, in itself the best and most effectual for obtaining the ends proposed; tho' there is an apparent conveniency in it to imperfect agents, whose minds might be embarrassed with a multiplicity of means, and their power insufficient for a great diversity of operations at the same time; but this reason cannot affect the infinite understanding of the supreme Being. Without entering into this inquiry, (which is perhaps too difficult for us,) or pretending to prove that the method of operation which the Author of nature has plainly chosen, is more excellent and reasonable in itself abstractly considered, and with respect to him; I shall only answer to the objection, that since God graciously intended to make his ways known to his intelligent creatures, and to manifest his wisdom so as they might be able to discern it, the method he has taken is on that account, and to answer that end, absolutely the best. If the manner of working had been intirely different; if the means had been as various as the particular ends accomplished by them; if there had been as great

SERM. a diversity of causes in nature, as of effects,  
 X. and every design carried on by a distinct method of proceeding;—This might have been as effectual, for any thing we know, and we are sure no more difficult to Omnipotence and infinite Understanding. But then it must have been to us utterly incomprehensible; and minds so limited as ours are, indeed any finite minds, could have had very little knowledge of the wisdom of God. Whereas in the present constitution, he has so accommodated the methods of his operation to the capacities of his intelligent creatures, that the *invisible things of him may be clearly seen by them, and they may trace the footsteps of his perfection in the things which he has made, which is the foundation both of their duty and their happiness, affording a most delightful entertainment to their minds, and directing them to form the measures of their conduct.*

But one observation is necessary to be added, that tho' God has given us clear manifestations of his wisdom, and sufficient for our conviction, if we do not wilfully shut our eyes against the light which breaks in upon us from every part of the known universe, from the constitution and the government of the inanimate, the sensitive, and the rational creatures; yet a great deal does and

must still remain secret to us. There are treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid in him, which we cannot possibly comprehend; indeed the intire scheme of his counsels and works can be kuown to no understanding but his own. Every attentive person must be sensible, that our knowledge of nature is very imperfect. Our senses, which convey to us the ideas of material existence, are confined within a narrow sphere. We have reason to believe there are vast regions in the universe beyond the reach of their discernment; and by what peculiar methods they may be govern'd, different from those which take place in our system, we cannot pretend to judge. There may be also, no doubt there are, other orders of intelligent beings besides mankind; and the laws by which they are ruled may differ in some particulars, from those which are given to us. Besides, of the things which fall under our observation, nay, which we are most familiarly conversant with, there are a great many properties and relations; indeed their very essences, the foundation of all their properties, are unknown to us. They are only the external appearances of things which we observe, and their connexions and dependencies are the subject of human science; but their intimate natures



SERM. from which these appearances flow, are un-

X. known. But shall we from our own ignorance, infer a defect of wisdom in the supreme Maker and Disposer of the universe? On the contrary, it ought to be allow'd, that if there be satisfying evidence of wisdom in all his works which we know, there is no reason to doubt of it in those parts which are remote from our view, or too deep for our penetration. What mind can be so weak or so prejudic'd as to suppose, that indeed wisdom rules in all that we see, (the regularity and harmony of things extorts this acknowledgement,) but in all the rest of the universe confusion and discord may reign, and nature be under no wise direction? Wisdom is the perfection of a cause, not of an effect; it belongs to an agent uniformly directing the exertion of his active powers, not confined to some of his operations; and therefore, if a being appears to be wise in a great variety of his works which we know, we reasonably conclude that the same wisdom directs the whole of his conduct. This observation, with respect to the works of creation and providence, is justified by experience. For whereas some things in the world, the uses of which were not at all known in the infancy of learning, such as vast tracts of mountains, barren desarts

deserts and wide seas, have been strongly insisted on as arguments to show the want of wisdom in the frame of nature; these very things are since found, by later discoveries, and a more accurate inquiry, to be highly useful, and to serve very important purposes. And as other objections of the same kind derive all their strength only from human ignorance and weakness, a more thorough knowledge would make them all disappear, and establish a conclusion directly contrary to that which unlearned sceptics would infer from them. In the mean time, it shows the most conceited and presumptuous folly for men to censure the Divine administration, merely because there are some things in it which they cannot comprehend, when the general voice of nature and providence proclaims it wise.

The proper use to be made of this doctrine is, that we should praise God. *All his works praise him* by manifesting his wisdom; and we whom he has made capable of discerning the characters and evidences of that perfection, owe him the tribute of the highest honour and esteem. Power may strike our minds with awe, and supreme Majesty make our hearts tremble, but it is wisdom that attracts veneration. In whatever degree any agent appears to be possess'd of that quality, he is intitled to

SERM. a proportionable measure of our respect. Wisdom and folly make the principal distinction among men, by which they are held in reputation or contempt. Tho' the differences of outward condition may be often too much regarded, and men of servile spirits may flatter the rich and great in their folly, while the *poor man's wisdom is despised*; yet the language of the heart is different, and true wisdom, wherever it is found, necessarily commands our inward esteem. But what is all the wisdom of men, or indeed the largest finite understandings, but an imperfect glimpse, when compared with the intellectual perfection of the Father of lights?

As praise is the noblest employment of the mind, one can't but be sensible of dignity and self-worth in doing honour to transcendent excellence, by affectionate acknowledgments and applauses; so it is a most delightful exercise; pleasure is inseparable from the hearty congratulation, and the soul even partakes of the intellectual and moral perfection, which it joyfully celebrates. And since the consciousness of dignity, and the delight which accompanies praise, must always bear a proportion to the apprehended excellency of the object, the praise which is given to the supreme Being, with understanding and sincere esteem, must,

must, on this account, infinitely exceed all SERM.  
others. It is therefore most becoming such X.  
imperfect rational creatures as we are, to con-  
template the works of God, with this design,  
that we may discern the manifestations of his  
wisdom in them, and thereby excite in our-  
selves those pious and devout affections, and  
that superlative respect, which are the very  
essence of praise, as it is a reasonable and  
moral service.

Any one who attentively considers the frame  
and condition of human nature in this world,  
must see, that tho' its capacities are great,  
and visibly intended for important ends, yet  
this our infancy of being, is very weak; that  
the present is a state of probation, wherein  
the progress of our understandings and our  
moral powers, with the enjoyment arising  
from them, in a great measure depend up-  
on such a diligent use of our own faculties,  
as a careful attention to the nature and order  
of them will direct. The first impressions  
made upon our minds are by sensible objects,  
and our appetites to them naturally arise,  
which being customarily indulged, the higher  
powers and affections of the soul are ne-  
glected and become weak; yet are we not  
left without an obvious remedy against this  
inconvenience and infirmity of our nature.  
As the least reflection will convince us, that  
there

SERM. there are higher and nobler powers in our nature, capable of a rational, a more refined and sublime enjoyment, than any which can belong to the animal part of our constitution; so the proper exercise of those higher faculties is naturally pointed out to us, by the work of God's law written upon our hearts, and by the evidences of his being and perfections, which are most plainly inscrib'd on his works, wherewith we are continually surrounded.

But still it is in our power to neglect the culture of the virtuous affections, and to let the natural motives of piety slip out of our minds. Whether we will do so or not is a great part of our trial. This however is certain, that nothing can be more worthy of us, or of more immediate importance to our greatest perfection and happiness, than that we should, with deliberation, design and diligence, apply ourselves to the proper exercise and improvement of our rational and moral faculties, in order to establish the supremacy of conscience, and, on that foundation, the inward harmony of the mind, and to obtain that enjoyment which naturally arises from universally self-approving, virtuous integrity. But tho' this be evidently rational and important, (scarcely will any thing be alledged in justification of the contrary;) yet how few are there



there of mankind, even of those who are in S E R M.  
reputation for wisdom and virtue, who make X.  
it their business to cultivate their rational and  
moral capacities, or have ever taken a resolution to make that their chief care through the course of their lives? For the most part, we learn our piety and virtue, as a foreign discipline, and only by outward instruction. Therefore it sits so awkwardly upon us, and the exercise of it is attended with little of such dexterity, vigour, warmth of affection and pleasure, as accompany the business of nature, which religion really is, in itself, and in the primary way God has taken to teach it to us, that is, by writing its main principles and instructions upon our hearts.

If we are sincerely disposed to employ ourselves in this excellent, this comprehensive duty of praising God, wherein our best affections join their force, and all the springs of manly pleasure unite in raising the satisfaction of the mind; if, I say, we are sincerely disposed to employ ourselves in it, the means are ready at hand. The works of God, in a most amazing and beautiful instructive variety, present themselves to us with their manifestations of his wisdom; they pour their evidence from all quarters, and into all the avenues of the mind, inviting us to behold perfect counsel

SERM. fel and wise design, which is the most agree-

X. able object we can contemplate. There is

no part of the universe to which we can turn our attention, nor any species of beings in it, that does not afford us the plainest discoveries of Divine skill and power in their formation and œconomy. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work : Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. The beasts of the field and the fowls of the air teach us, and the fishes of the sea declare to us, that he is perfectly wise who gave them their being, and appointed their various uses, with all the circumstances of their condition. In this view the work of the Lord appears honourable and glorious, and it is sought out of them that have pleasure therein. They trace the signatures of counsel upon it, with the highest admiration, and their hearts are filled with joy and praise. A heart full of such sentiments will be its own instructor in religion, and needs not to be taught from abroad what duty it owes to God, what love and gratitude, what confidence, obedience and resignation.*

Providence, as I have already observed, has afforded us great and peculiar advantages for making proficiency in this kind of knowledge, and thereby advancing in substantial piety.

Some

Some eminent persons in these last days, and S E R M.  
that part of the world where we live, have X.  
happily employ'd an uncommon capacity in  
searching out the works of nature, and illustrating the marvelous displays of Divine wisdom in them; so that the subject appears in quite a different light from what it has hitherto done, and is even brought down to the level of vulgar understandings. What has been sometimes called philosophy, the vain, the poor production of impiety, ignorance and pride, was really what the Apostle calls, *the wisdom, through which the world knew not God.* But happy our times! wherein whatever is worthy to be called learning evidently terminates in religion as its last result, and shews us *all things full of God.* Let us pursue the method which has been so clearly marked out to us. Let those whose talents and leisure enable them, endeavour to build a farther superstructure on the noble foundation already laid, and by investigating the secrets of nature, so far as human understanding can reach, discern the counsels of its Author, that they may give him due praise. And let them who are unqualified for such an undertaking, yet study to be acquainted with the useful discoveries others have made; and by affectionate meditation

SERM. tation on them, feed the pure flame of rational devotion in their own breasts.

X.

But above all kinds of natural knowledge, there is one branch which may be most profitably improved to the purposes of religion, by contemplating the wisdom of God in it; I mean the philosophy of human nature itself, not only or principally of the corporeal part, tho' even *that* is a wonderful work of God, a most curious structure, wherein Divine wisdom shines conspicuously. It is indeed surprising, that any who have studied the animal constitution and œconomy, should forget God its Maker. Others, we know, have made many just and pious reflections upon it, as an admirable monument of the Creator's skill, wherein he has shewed himself *great in counsel and wonderful in working*. But what I chiefly aim at is, that we should apply ourselves to the serious consideration of our more inward fabric, that of the mind, whereby we are distinguish'd with the character of rational creatures. Of all the external objects we discern, bearing, in a vast variety, the marks of the Creator's intelligence and power, there is none which has any resemblance to this. It has no shape or colour, or any other sensible quality; yet there is nothing more real, nothing more important to us. We are conscious  
of

of its various, many of them deeply interest-  
ing, perceptions and operations, accompanied  
with different kinds and degrees of pleasure  
and pain. This object, intimately near us,  
(for 'tis that whereby we are what we are,  
*our very selves,*) will, in that view of things  
we are now considering, appear most worthy  
of our first and careful attention. To this  
purpose, some of the principal appearances  
have been observed, in the preceding part of  
this discourse; but in every view we can take  
of it, it appears a beautiful offspring of God's  
light, and a noble production of his power.  
The intellectual and self-determining facul-  
ties, the self-reflecting, authoritative and con-  
trouling judgment of the mind upon its own  
dispositions and voluntary acts, and the affec-  
tions to spiritual and moral objects, characters  
and actions;—These are subjects of contempla-  
tion, to which we meet with nothing parallel  
in the whole of material nature. And when,  
in conjunction with them, we consider the  
other subordinate powers and determinations  
of the human soul, its senses, appetites and  
passions; there is a beautiful scene opened to  
us, wherein we may entertain ourselves most  
agreeably, and be furnished with excellent  
arguments of praise to our great and wise Cre-  
ator. This Divine workmanship appears a  
regular

SERM.

X.



SERM. regular system, comprehending a multitude  
X. of parts, but all connected together, and  
variously related. The great end of a perpetually increasing rational perfection and happiness, is plainly intended, and the means are excellently fitted to it. There are many inferior powers, instincts and affections, each serving a several useful purpose, and having pleasure annexed to it, but all in subordination to the ultimate end, which nature directs us steddily to pursue. In a system so various, containing so many different powers and springs of action, of opposite tendency, it can scarcely be expected, at least in its infancy and state of appointed imperfection, but that some disorders should happen; and so we find it in fact. But still the remedy is in the soul itself; by the proper exertion of its own power, there is provision made for inward order, harmony and peace, which is the natural, healthful and happy state of the mind. This science, like others, has had its vicissitudes; sometimes in a more flourishing, sometimes in a declining state. Some eminent attempts have, of late, been made to rescue it from the obscurity and ignorance of the barbarous middle ages. But that every man, for himself, may study it successfully, nothing is more necessary than frequent,

frequent, careful and unprejudic'd self-inspec- SERM.  
tion ; whereby pious affections will be excited X.  
in our minds, and we shall be led to ascribe, *to*  
*the only wise God all honour and glory for ever.*

2dly, As by the manifestation of God's wisdom in the frame and constitution of things, we are directed to celebrate his praises with understanding and sincere affection ; so by the continued exercise of the same glorious attribute in his government of the world, we are encourag'd to trust in him at all times and in all circumstances, if we sincerely endeavour to approve ourselves to him by imitating his moral perfections, and obeying his laws (the only condition upon which, by the very constitution of our nature, we can have confidence towards God ;) for he has the whole series of events under his direction, appointing even the remotest issues of them. Vain are the contrivances of wicked mortals, against the gracious designs of providence towards good men ; *the counsels of the froward are turned headlong*, their mischievous purposes are disappointed, *for the Lord knows how to deliver the godly from temptations.* We ought not to pronounce judgment upon the first face of things, nor be greatly discouraged because of irregular appearances. We may be assured they are no more than appearances, for it is impossible there

SERM. should be any real disorder, where infinite Wis-

X. dom rules. And tho' our knowledge of particular events is very short, this may always yield us satisfaction, and support our hope, that the whole course of nature, and all the vicissitudes of human affairs are govern'd by perfect reason.

Here is, one would think, a solid foundation of inward tranquillity to intelligent creatures, and a relief under all their anxieties for the future. For what could a rational being desire, but that eternal unerring reason should direct the series of events, and determine what comes to pass? If, in fact, the world be so govern'd, and our persuasion of it rests upon solid grounds, this must be delightful to the human mind, a never-failing spring of consolation. Supposing on the contrary, that there were no such thing as counsel in the government of the universe, but that all things were guided by blind chance or necessity; how must this dissipate the vigour of the soul, disorder all its powers, and fill it with horror? The present state, and indeed the whole of existence, would then be, in the strictest and most proper Sense, as *Job* represents the state of death, \* *a land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness,*

\* *Job* x. 22.

*darkness.* But since it is not so, since *the only* SERM.  
*wise God reigneth, his counsel standeth for ever,* X.

*and the thoughts of his heart to all generations,*  
 let all the rational inhabitants of the *earth*  
*rejoice, and the multitude of the isles be glad*  
*thereof.* What can give greater satisfaction  
 and inward security to a considerate unpreju-  
 dic'd mind? For, upon this principle, the last  
 result of all things must be, just as such a  
 mind would wish it to be.

*Lastly,* We ought always to acquiesce in the  
 present disposition of things by Divine provi-  
 dence, and comply with its counsels, as far as  
 we know them. God's ways are unsearcha-  
 ble, and his judgments past finding out; but  
 when he is pleas'd to show his purposes in par-  
 ticular events, tho' we cannot discern the rea-  
 sons of them and their full design, it becomes  
 us to submit, not because of his sovereign do-  
 minion, (which, abstracting from the conside-  
 ration of his wisdom, can never produce a ra-  
 tional resignation, nor satisfy our understand-  
 ings any more than unintelligent fate, the  
 blind idol of *Atheists*;) but because we know  
 he is infinitely wise, who in these instances de-  
 clares his will. He has, 'tis true, given us un-  
 derstanding, and we should use it in the best  
 manner we can, for the direction of our own  
 practice. Prudence however will direct such

SERM. as are conscious of their own weakness, to

X. carry it with great deference to acknowledg'd  
 superior understanding, and hearken to instruction. But surely the very imperfect understandings of men, should never exalt themselves against the perfect Wisdom which rules the universe. Therefore when God is pleas'd to interpose, by disappointing our designs and breaking our measures, the humblest resignation is our unquestionable duty; and what he has plainly discover'd to be the design and appointment of his providence, we should cheerfully submit to, because we are sure it is wisest in the whole: Still remembering, as a first maxim, and of the utmost importance, that what God has evidently shown, by the clear light of our own reason, to be the proper ends of our being, these we ought constantly to pursue, and inviolably adhere to that invariable rule which he has given us for the conduct of life. We cannot fathom the depth of his wisdom, nor know the secret of his counsels; *but unto man he has said, \* Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*

\* Job. xxviii. 28.

F I N I S.

